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# GOSPELS OF ANARCHY.

AND

OTHER CONTEMPORARY STUDIES

VERNON LEE

T. FISHER UNWIN

LONDON

ADELPHI TERRACE

LEIPSIK

INSELSTRASSE 20

1908



To

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H. G. WELLS





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**GOSPELS OF ANARCHY**

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## GOSPELS OF ANARCHY

**I**N such of us as not merely live, but think and feel what life is and might be, there is enacted an inner drama full of conflicting emotions, long drawn out through the years, and, in many cases, never brought to a conclusion.

It begins with the gradual suspicion, as we pass out of childish tutelage, that the world is not at all the definite, arranged, mechanical thing which the doctrine convenient to our elders and our own optimistic egoism have led us to expect; that the causes and results of actions are by no means so simple as we imagined, and that good and evil are not so distinctly opposed as black and white. We guess, we slowly recognise with difficulty and astonishment, that this well-regulated structure called the universe or life is a sham constructed by human hands; that the reality is a seething whirlpool of forces seemingly blind, mainly disorderly and cruel, and, at the best, utterly indifferent; a chaos of which we recognise, with humiliation turning into cynicism, that our poor self is but a part and a sample.

Thus we feel. But if we feel long enough, and do

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not get blunted in the process, we are brought gradually, by additional seeing and feeling, to a totally new view of things. The chaos becomes ordered, the void a firmament; and we recognise with joy and pride that the universe has made us, and that we, perceiving it, have made the universe in our turn; and that therefore "in la sua volontade è nostra pace."

The following notes display this process of destruction and reconstruction in one particular type of mind; embody, for the benefit of those who constitutionally tend to think alike, and still more of those who are constitutionally bound to think otherwise, the silent discussions on anarchy and law which have arisen in me as a result of other folks' opinions and my own experience of life's complexities and deadlocks.

### I

The intellectual rebellion and lawlessness of our contemporaries have been summed up by Mr. Henry Brewster, in a book too subtle and too cosmopolitan ever to receive adequate appreciation.

"On the one hand, a revolt against any philosophical system of unity, which many would call a revolt against all philosophy, genuine scepticism. Then the denial that the feeling of obligation can be brought to bear on any fixed point. . . . Morally, we must content ourselves with the various injunctions of wisdom and with distinct, independent ideals. Something beyond them is, indeed, recognised; but, whereas we were accustomed to place it in the obligatory character of

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...prescriptions, we are now told to understand it as a perpetual warning against all dogmatism.<sup>1</sup>

This is, as I have said, the modern formula of scepticism and revolt. But similar doubts must have arisen, most certainly, in all kinds of men at all times, producing worldly wise cynicism in some and religious distress in others. Such doubts as these have lurked, one suspects, at the bottom of all transcendentalism. They are summed up in Emerson's disquieting remark that saints are sad where philosophers are merely interested, because the first see sin where the second see only cause and effect. They are implied in a great deal of religious mysticism, habitually lurking in esoteric depths of speculation, but penetrating occasionally, mysterious subtle gases, to life's surface, and there igniting at contact with the active impulses of men; whence the ambiguous ethics, the questionable ways of many sects originally ascetic. Nay, it is quite conceivable that, if there really existed the thing called the *Secret of the Church* which Villiers de l'Isle Adam's gambling abbé staked at cards against twenty louis-d'or, it would be found to be, not that *there is no purgatory*, but rather that *there is no heaven and hell, no law and no sin*.

Be this as it may, all dogmatic religions have forcibly repressed such speculations, transcendental or practical, upon the ways of the universe and of man. And it is only in our own day, with the habit of each individual striking out his practice for himself, and with the scientific recognition that the various religiously sanctioned codes embody a very rough-and-ready practi-

<sup>1</sup> "Theories of Anarchy and Law," p. 113



cability—it is only in our own day that people are beginning to question the perfection of established rules of conduct, to discuss the drawbacks of duty and self-sacrifice, and to speculate upon the possible futility of all ethical systems, nay, upon the possible vanity of all ideals and formulas whatever.

But the champions of moral anarchy and intellectual nihilism have made up for lost time, and the books I intend discussing in the following notes contain, systematically or by implication, what one might call the ethics, the psychology, and the metaphysics of negation. These doctrines of the school which denies all schools and all doctrines are, as I hope to show, not of Mephistophelian origin. *The spirit which denies* has arisen, in our days at least, neither from heartlessness nor from levity. On the contrary, and little as the apostles of anarchy may suspect it, it is from greater sensitiveness to the sufferings of others, and greater respect for intellectual sincerity, that have resulted these doubts of the methods hitherto devised for diminishing unhappiness and securing truth. And for this reason, if no other, such subversive criticism ought to be of the highest use to the very notions and tendencies which it attacks: we want better laws, better formulas, better ideals; we want a wiser attitude towards laws, formulas, and ideals in general; and this *better* we shall get only by admitting that we have not already got the best.

Leaving alone the epic feats of the old spirit of duty, the tragedies of Jeanie Deans and Maggie Tulliver, the lesser, though not less astonishing, heroism shown us in some of Mary Wilkins's New

England stories, we have all of us witnessed the action of that moral training which thwarted personal preferences and repugnances, and victoriously silenced their claims. We have all of us heard of women (particularly in the times of our mothers and grandmothers) refusing the man they loved and marrying the man of whom their parents approved; we still look on, every day, at lives dragged along in hated companionship; at talents—nay actual vocations—suppressed in deference to family prejudice or convenience: acts of spiritual mutilation so thorough as often to minimise their own suffering, changing the current of life, atrophying organic possibilities in such a way that the victim's subsequent existence was not actively unhappy, and not even obviously barren. Such things still go on all round us. The difference now is that the minor sacrifices are no longer taken for granted by all lookers-on; and the grand, heroic self-immolation no longer universally applauded. There has arisen (it began, not without silly accompaniments enough, and disgusting ones, in the eighteenth century) an active suspiciousness towards all systematic tampering with human nature. We have had to recognise all the mischief we have done by always knowing better than the mechanical and spiritual forces of the universe; we are getting to believe more and more in the organic, the constitutional, and the unconscious; and there is an American book (by the late Mr. Marsh) on the disastrous consequences of cutting down forests, draining lakes, and generally subverting natural arrangements in our greed for immediate advantages, which might be taken, every chapter of it, as an allegorical exhibition

of the views to which many people are tending on the subject of religious and social discipline.

We have had to recognise, moreover, that a great deal of all the discipline and self-sacrifice hitherto so universally recommended has been for the benefit of individuals, and even classes, who by no means reciprocated towards their victims ; and we cannot deny that there is a grain of truth in Nietzsche's contempt for what he calls the " Ethics of Slaves." And, finally, we see very plainly that the reasonableness and facility of thorough-going self-sacrifice is intimately connected with a belief that such self-sacrifice would be amply compensated in another existence : it was rational to give up the present for the future ; it is not rational to prefer a future which is problematic to a present which alone is quite certain. In this way have all of us who think at all begun to think differently from our fathers ; indeed, we feel upon this point even more than we actually think. We warn people not to give up their possibilities of activity and happiness in deference to the wishes of others. We almost unconsciously collect instances of such self-sacrifice as has entailed the damage of others, instances of the tissues of the social fabric being insidiously rotted through the destruction of one of its human cells ; and these instances, alas ! are usually correct and to the point. We even invent, or applaud the invention of, other instances which are decidedly far-fetched : for instance, Mrs. Alving producing her son's hereditary malady by not acquiescing more openly in his father's exuberant *joy of life* ; and Pastor Rosmer destroying, by his scruples, the resources for happiness of the less scrupulous Rebecca.

I have chosen these examples on purpose, for they have enabled me to give a name to these portions of the anarchical tendencies of our day : we are, all of us who look a little around us and feel a little for others, more or less infected with *Ibsenism*; conscious or unconscious followers of the Ibsenite gospel which Mr. Bernard Shaw<sup>1</sup> preaches with jaunty fanaticism. This seems, on the whole, a very good thing. Except, perhaps, in the question of manners, of courtesy, particularly between the sexes (æsthetic superfluities, but which help to make life liveable), I feel persuaded that even the most rabid Ibsenism will be advantageous in the long run. The more we let nature work for us, the more we employ our instincts and tendencies, instead of thwarting them, the less will be the waste, the greater the achievement. But in all similar reactions against past exaggeration there is apt to be a drawback; alongside of a great gain, a certain loss; and this we should do our utmost to minimise. The old conception of duty was warped by the fearful error of thinking that human nature is bad; or, as we moderns would express it, that the instincts of the individual are hostile to the community. This was, calmly looked at, monstrous. But are we not, perhaps, on the brink of a corresponding error, less enormous of course, but large enough to grow a fine crop of misery? The error, I mean, of taking for granted that human nature is already entirely good; that the instincts, desires, nay, interests of the individual are necessarily in accordance with the good

<sup>1</sup> "The Quintessence of Ibsenism"—and implicitly wherever else Ibsenism is not itself being attacked by G. B. S.

of the community. The Ibsenian theory is right in saying that there are lots of people, a majority, even, who had much better have had their own way. But is the Ibsenian theory right in supposing that certain other persons (and there may be strands of such in the best of us), persons like Captain Alving, or Rebecca West, or Hedda Gabler, or the Master Builder, would have become harmless and desirable if no one had interfered with their self-indulgence, their unscrupulousness, their inborn love of excitement, or their inborn *ego*-mania? Surely not. There is not the smallest reason why the removal of moral stigma and of self-criticising ideals should reduce these people's peculiar instincts (and these people, I repeat, are mere types of what is mixed up in most of us) to moderation.

Nor is moderation the remedy for all evils. There are in us tendencies to feel and act which survive from times when the mere preservation of individual and of race was desirable quite unconditionally; but which, in our altered conditions, require not moderating, but actually replacing by something more discriminating, less wasteful and mischievous. Vanity, for instance, covetousness, ferocity, are surely destined to be evolved away, the useful work they once accomplished being gradually performed by instincts of more recent growth which spoil less in the process. Improvement, in the moral life as in any other, is a matter of transformation; if we are to use our instincts, our likings and dislikings, to carry us from narrower circles of life to wider ones, we must work unceasingly at reconstituting those likings and dislikings themselves. Now, the evolution by which our *ego* has become less

incompatible with its neighbours has taken place, largely, by the mechanism of ideals and duties, of attaching to certain acts an odium sufficient to counterbalance their attraction, till it has become more and more difficult to enjoy oneself thoroughly at other folks' cost. And this Ibsenites are apt to forget.

Ibsenites ask whether it was not horrible that Claudio should be put to death because Isabella stickled about chastity; that an innocent Effie Deans should be hanged because Jeanie had cut-and-dried ideas of veracity; that Brutus's son should die because his father was so rigidly law-abiding. But it would have been far more horrible for the world at large if people had always been ready to sacrifice chastity, veracity, or legality to family feelings; indeed, could such have been the case, the world, or at least humankind, would probably have gone to pieces before Claudio, or Effie, or the son of Brutus had been born. Cut-and-dried notions of conduct are probably exactly commensurate with moral slackness. We do not require to deter people from what they do not want to do, nor to reward them for what they would do unrewarded. The very difficulty of acting spontaneously in any given way demands the formation of more or less unreasoning habits; the difficulty of forming desirable habits demands the coercive force of public opinion; and the insufficient power of mere opinion necessitates that appeal to brute force which is involved in all application of the law. The oversight of Ibsenian anarchists (whatever Ibsen's individual views on the subject) is that of imagining that duties, ideals, laws can be judged by examining their action in the

individual case ; for their use, their evolutionary *raison d'être*, is only for the general run.

The champions of the *Will of the Ego*, whether represented by bluff Bernard Shaw or by ambiguous Maurice Barrès,<sup>1</sup> start from the supposition that because the individual is a concrete existence, while the species is obviously an abstraction, the will of the individual can alone be a reality, and the will of the species must be a figment. They completely forget that there is not one concrete individual, but an infinite number of concrete individuals, and that what governs the world is, therefore, the roughly averaged will of all these concrete individuals. The single individual may *will to live* as hard as he can, will to expand, assimilate, reproduce, cultivate his *moi*, or anything else besides ; but the accomplishment of that Will of his—nay, the bare existence of himself and his Will—depends entirely upon the Will of the species. Without the permission of that abstract entity which he considers a figment, the concrete and only really real individual would never have realised his individual existence at all. This is not saying that his own will is not to react against the will of the species ; for the will of the species is merely the averaged will of its component individuals, and as the individual will alters, so must the averaged will differ. The opinions and ideals and institutions of the present and the future are unconsciously, and in some cases consciously, modified, however infinitesimally, by the reactions of every living man and woman ; and the

<sup>1</sup> "L'Ennemi des Lois," "Le Jardin de Bérénice," "Un Homme Libre."

more universal this atomic individual modification, the higher the civilisation, the greater the bulk of happiness attained and attainable. Meanwhile ideals, commandments, institutions are, each for its own time, so many roads, high roads, if not royal roads, to the maximum of good behaviour possible in any given condition. Without them, people would have to carry their virtuous potentialities through bogs and briars, where most of them would remain sticking. Succeeding generations, knowing more of the soil and employing more accurate measurements, making, moreover, free use of blasting powder, may build shorter and easier roads, along which fewer persons will die; roads also in a greater variety of directions, that every one may get near his real destination. And the more each individual keeps his eyes open to the inconveniences and dangers of the existing roads to righteousness, and airs his criticisms thereof, the better: for the majority, which is as slow as the individual is quick, is not likely to destroy the old thoroughfares before having made itself new ones. The Ibsenite anarchists are right in reminding us that there is really nothing holy in such a road; for holiness is a quality, not of institutions, but of character, and a man can be equally holy along a new road as along an old one; alas! as holy along a wrong road as along a right one. But we, on the other hand, must remind the Ibsenites that new or old, right or wrong, such high roads are high roads to the advantage not always of the single individual at any given moment, but of the majority at most times, or, at least, of the majority composed of the most typical individuals.



## II

After our doubts regarding the validity of the ideals, and institutions to which society expects each individual voluntarily to conform, come doubts, even more necessary and natural, concerning the majesty of the methods by which society enforces its preference on such individuals as fail to conform spontaneously thereunto.

Such doubts as these are by no means due to the growth of sympathy only, to what is called, and sometimes really is, mere sentimental weakness. Together with disbelief in a theologically appointed universe, we have witnessed the growth of respect both for fact and for logic ; and, as a consequence, we no longer regard the infringement of a human law as the rebellion to the will of God. We have replaced the notion of *sin* by the notion of *crime* ; and the particular act which we happen to call a *crime* is no longer, in our eyes, a detached and spontaneously generated fact in a single individual character, but the result of a dozen converging causes, of which this individual character may be only one, while the constitution of surrounding society is sure to be another of the determinants. We recognise also that while, on the one hand, the capacity for committing certain acts intolerable to the majority does not imply utter worthlessness in many other directions ; on the other hand, the thorough-going perversity which renders an individual criminal an unmitigated evil to his fellow-creatures involves constitutional and irresistible tendencies which are incompatible with any notion of responsibility. All this

comes to saying that the coercion and punishment of offenders has become a question not of morality, but of police ; that it has ceased to be a sort of holy sacrifice to God, and grown to be a rough-and-ready way of getting rid of a nuisance. And this has altered our feelings from the self-complacency of a priest to the humiliation of an unwilling scavenger. We are getting a little ashamed of the power to imprison, bully, outlaw, destroy either life or life's possibilities, which constitutes the *secular arm* of all theoretic morality.

Is ~~such~~ a feeling mistaken? Surely only inasmuch as it would turn a desirable possibility for the future into an unmanageable actuality in the present. For, however much we may admit that bodily violence, and the kind of discipline dependent thereupon, are necessary in the present, and will be necessary for longer than we dare foresee in the future, we must open our eyes to the fact that all progress represents a constant diminution thereof. Similarly we must be careful that all our methods (even the methods including authoritativeness and violence) shall tend to the eventual disappearance of violence towards human beings and authoritativeness towards adults ; violence remaining our necessary method with brutes and authoritativeness with children, but even in these relations diminishing to the utmost. For violence, and the discipline founded on violence (as distinguished from self-discipline sprung from intelligence and adaptability) means not merely suffering, but wastefulness worse than suffering, because it entails it : waste of the possibilities of adaptation in him who exerts it, as well as of constitutional improvement in him who suffers from it. Waste above

all of the *Reality*, the reality which must be slightly different in every individual case, reality containing the possibilities of new arrangements and new faculties ; reality which we cruelly disregard whenever we treat individual cases as merely typical, whenever we act on the one half of a case containing similarity, and neglect the other half of the case containing difference. Such wastefulness of method is necessary just in proportion as we are deficient in the power of seeing, feeling, sympathising, discriminating ; deficient in the power of selecting, preferring, and postponing. Violence over body and over mind ; violence against the will of others ; violence against fact : these represent the friction in the imperfect machinery of life ; and progress is but the substitution of human mechanism more and more delicate and solid, through which the movement is ever greater, the friction ever less.

Meanwhile, do we possess a human mechanism as good as it might be ? Tolstoi, Ibsen, the author of the very suggestive dialogues on Anarchy and Law, even egoistic decadents like Maurice Barrès, the whole heterogeneous crusade of doubt and rebellion, are doing good work in showing that we have not ; in forcing us to consider what proportions of subtlety and clumsiness, of movement and of friction, of utility and waste, are represented by the system of coercion and punishment accepted in our days. And such an examination will surely prove that in this matter we have developed our ingenuity less (sometimes atrophied it), and proceeded with far greater hurry and slovenliness than with any of the other products of civilisation. Try and imagine where building, agriculture, manu-

facture, any of the most common crafts would be, had it been carried on throughout the centuries as we still carry on the moralisation of mankind ; if stone, brick, soil, manure, raw material, let alone the physical and chemical laws, had been treated in the rough-and-ready manner in which we treat human thought and impulse ! But the fact is that we have required food, clothing, and shelter so bitterly hitherto, that all our best intelligence and energy have gone to diminish wastefulness in their production ; and no time has remained, no power of discrimination, for making the best of intellectual and moral qualities. Indeed, we have dealt, and we deal only, with the *bad* moral qualities of mankind ; those that can be seen in spare five minutes and with a rushlight ; nay, those which are stumbled over in the dark and kicked into corners. We may hope for improvement almost in proportion as we recognise that punishment is the expression not of responsibility towards heaven on the part of the malefactor, but of incapacity and hurry on the part of those whom the malefactor damages. For here even as in the question of duties and ideals, what we are suffering from is lack of discrimination, paucity of methods, insufficiency of formulas ; and what we want is not less law, but more law : law which will suit the particular case which is a reality and has results, not merely the general run, which is an abstraction and takes care of itself.

### III

Out of these various doubts about standards of conduct and social arrangements there arises gradually

a central core of doubt, to which the others can be logically reduced; the doubt, namely, whether the individuality is not cramped, enfeebled, rendered unfit for life, by obedience to any kind of abstraction, to anything save its own individual tendencies. Oddly enough, the psychological theory had in this matter preceded the thorough-going practical application; and the implicit principles of subsequent anarchical views were expressed by the earliest and least read of anarchist writers, Max Stirner (Kaspar Schmidt),<sup>1</sup> who died so long ago as 1856.

Max Stirner builds up his system—for his hatred of system is expressed in elaborately systematic form—upon the notion that the *Geist*, the intellect which forms conceptions, is a colossal cheat for ever robbing the individual of its due, and marring life by imaginary obstacles; a wicked sort of Archimago, whose phantasmagoria, *duty, ideal, vocation, aim, law, formula*, can be described only by the untranslatable German word *Spuk*, a decidedly undignified haunting by bogies. Against this kingdom of delusion the human individual—*der Einzige*—has been, since the beginning of time, slowly and painfully fighting his way; never attaining to any kind of freedom, but merely exchanging one form of slavery for another, slavery to the religious delusion for slavery to the metaphysic delusion, slavery to divine right for slavery to civic liberty; slavery to dogma, commandment, heaven and hell, for slavery to sentiment, humanity, progress; all equally mere words, conceits, figments, by which the wretched individual

<sup>1</sup> "Der Einzige und sein Eigenthum."

has allowed himself to be coerced and martyred : the wretched individual who alone is a reality.

This is the darkest, if not the deepest, pit of anarchical thought ; and through its mazes Stirner drags us round and round for as long a time as Kant requires for his Categories, or the Mediæval Monk for the imitation of Christ—both of which, by the way, are good examples of *Spuk*. But even as Dante clambered out of hell by continuing the way he had come down, so we also can emerge from Stirner's negations by pursuing the arguments which had led into them. And, having got to the individual as the only and original reality, we can work our way back to those subsidiary and contingent realities, the individual's duties, ideals, and institutions.

There is nothing real, says Stirner, but the various conditions of the individual ; the rest is delusion, *Spuk*. But if only the *ego* is real, how can anything else interfere with it? If such abstractions and figments as *God, State, Family, Morality* (or whatever the name of the particular bogey), can cramp, cabin, maim our individuality ; then, since our individuality alone has reality, these various delusions must be a part of our individuality. Free yourselves, says Stirner, from your own ideas. But our ideas, whether spontaneously generated in ourselves or assimilated from others, must, in order to have real powers such as we attribute to them, be a part of ourself : and if we sacrifice any other part of ourself to those ideas, it is a proof that they, and not the sacrificed part, must be, at that particular conjunction of circumstances, the dominant part of our *ego*. Stirner's psychology

admits love for individuals as a determinant of action ; and similarly regard for the reciprocity of self-interest. But is not love for mankind, however vague the mankind, and regard for principle, however abstract the principle, quite as much a real active power of our nature ? If Stirner is made uncomfortable, as he says, by the frown on the face of his beloved, and “kisses the frown away”—to rid himself of his discomfort ; why, so are other *egos*—less numerous, but not less real—made uncomfortable by the look of pain in men and women whom they do not care for, nay, by the mere knowledge that men and women, even animals, whom they have never seen, are suffering, or are likely to suffer : and, in certain *egos*—rarest, but most efficaciously real—there will arise an impulse—yes, something so irresistibly real as a constitutional impulse—to sacrifice everything for the sake of diminishing that unseen, that possible suffering : suffering present in hospitals, in factories, in slums, in prisons, or future suffering in hell.

And similarly there are *egos* which are made as wretched by the neglect of some civic or religious duty as Stirner could possibly be by skipping a meal or losing a night's sleep. It is quite a different question whether such ideas as these, ideas whose coercive power reveals them an integral part of the *ego*, happen or not to coincide with the courses most desirable for the total welfare either of one single *ego* or of a great number of *egos*. The point at issue is whether or not such active factors in life can be treated as separate from life itself ; it is a different question similarly whether any more egoistic preference, say for alcohol or gambling,

happens in the long run to tally with the *ego's* advantage. Stirner, indeed, entrenches himself behind the notion that wherever there exists any kind of overmastering desire, need, or idea, the *ego* ceases to exist. But, as a psychological fact, at any given moment of reality, some desire, need, or idea, or group of desires, needs, or ideas, *must* inevitably be having the mastery, otherwise impulse would disappear and action of all kinds cease. For the *ego* which refuses to be dominated by any particular idea or any particular desire, be it externalised as humanity, duty, or merely tobacco or bottle, is an *ego* dominated by some other idea or desire, by the idea or desire that it ought to be free from such domination in particular, or from all conscious domination in general. But as to an *ego* which, at any given moment, is otherwise than dominated by some feeling, impulse, or thought, that kind of *ego* is, oddly enough, exactly the thing which Stirner is waging war against—an abstraction, a nonentity, a figment of logic, of which we have no practical experience. Yes, indeed, nothing but the *ego* is efficient; since, to be efficient, everything else must have been absorbed into or must impinge upon it.

This anarchical psychology of Stirner's (and something similar, however unformulated, exists in the mind also of Maurice Barrès and of Bernard Shaw) brings home to me how much we stand in need of a new science of will, thought, and emotion; or, rather, of the practical application of such a science of the soul as recent years have already given us. It would put us equally above the new-fangled theories of freeing the *ego* by abolishing ideals and habits, and above the old-



fashioned notions of thwarting the *ego* in the name of morality. For it would show that the *ego* is not the separate momentary impulse, but the organic hierarchy of united and graduated impulses; a unity which being evolved by contact with similar unities, can be made<sup>6</sup> as harmonious with them as the mere separate impulses, referring to mere partial and momentary relations, are likely to be the reverse. This being understood, we shall seek less for the outer discipline, the constraining of the individual by society, than for the inner discipline, the subordination of the individual's lesser and also less durable motives to the greater and more durable. We shall, once we have really conceived this organic unity of the individual, desist from our wasteful and cruel attempts to reduce all men to one pattern, to extract from all the same kind of service. But in such healthy development of the *ego*, in such organic, inner discipline, the conscious reference to standards, the conscious desire for harmony, will be an indispensable means. Duties and ideals will again be valued above all things; not, indeed, as intellectual <sup>rules</sup> ~~rules~~, but as factors of habitual emotional conditions. For the chief value of duty or ideal is the capacity fostered thereby of being dutiful, of acting in accordance with an ideal. Among the great gifts for which we must thank the theological systems of the past, the Puritan element in every creed, the most valuable are not the tables of permissions and prohibitions, always variable, and still very rough and ready. The splendid work of Puritanism is the training, nay, the conception, of a real individuality, the habit of self-dominion, of postponing, foregoing the immediate, momentary and

temporal for the sake of a distant, permanent, and, inasmuch as intellectually recognised, spiritual something. The moral value of Jeanie Deans is not in her conviction that under no circumstances must a lie be told (although her conviction was correct in 999 cases out of 1,000), but in her incapacity of telling a lie so long as she was convinced against it. Puritanism is psychologically right in its implicit recognition of the superiority of the habitual condition of feeling over the transient impulse. For *what I habitually wish to be* represents, or ought to represent, the bulk of my nature and organisation more really than *what at a given moment I actually am*. If individualism is to triumph, if any good is to come (and it doubtless will) out of contemporary anarchic theories of the *ego*, it will be by an increase rather than a diminution of the healthy Puritan element. It is, after all, the Puritans in temper who have done all successful rebellion against items of Puritan codes; whereas the egoist of the modern type is, nine times out of ten, the sort of person who tolerates evil for want of the self-discipline and consistency necessary to stop it.

## IV

After the psychology of anarchy comes its metaphysics, or, I would almost say, its theology. Theology, because, not satisfied with appealing to our reason, it meddles with the instincts which seek for the quality we call *divine*, and for the emotions that quality awakens; and theology also, because it occasionally

even suggests the making of new gods, the creation of a strange metaphorical Olympus. Like all other theology, it is esoteric and exoteric ; it has its treatises of highest metaphysical subtlety ; and its little popular catechisms, quite full of explicit absurdities. Such a catechism as this was made up by the late J. A. Symonds out of the opinions, or what he took to be the opinions, of Walt Whitman. It is the declaration of the equal rights and equal dignity of all the parts of man's nature ; and implicitly therefore of the foolishness of all the hierarchies which various creeds and various systems of ethics have set up in the soul and the life of mankind. It is characteristically different in tone from the anarchical utterances of the egotistic decadent Barrès and the metaphysical Nihilist Stirner ; it is eminently Anglo-Saxon in a sort of unconscious optimistic cant. Its subversiveness consists in an attempt to set things right ; but it does so, not by pleading that nothing is evil, but rather by insisting that everything is good. The democratic view, as it is called, of Whitman, as expounded by Symonds, consists in asserting that all things are equally divine.

Now if you start with identifying *divine* with *divinely ordained*, and identify the Divinity with the bare fact of existence, then all things are certainly portions of the Divinity, and, in so far, *divine*. But if all things are in this sense *divine*, then *divine* ceases to be a quality which evokes any sense of preference ; then *divine* is no longer an expression commensurate with esteem, still less legitimately productive of emotional satisfaction ; if all things are divine, why then some may be divine and honourable and others

divine and dishonourable. There is something akin in this anarchic theology to the juggling with the word *value* of Karl Marx and his followers. It is the acceptance of the emotional quality of a word after emptying out the meaning which had produced it. Good, noble, divine; a hierarchy of words denoting such qualities as we think especially desirable; denoting the fuller possession of that which we esteem most highly in ourselves, be it strength or beauty, moral or intellectual helpfulness; words which awaken in our mind the sense of approval, of respect, and finally of reverence and wonder. Perform a little sleight-of-hand, and shuffle *divinity* with *God*, *God* with *Nature*, *Nature* with *Being*, and you contrive to awaken that emotion of rareness, superiority, wonderfulness, in connection with . . . with what? O irony of self-delusion! with *everything equally*.

This subversion of all appreciation is the furthest possible from being, as Whitman seems to have imagined, and as Symonds reiterates, a highly scientific thought. For science teaches us that all life, and especially the life we human beings call *progress*, is not a mere affirmation, so to speak, of mere passive being, of "what is—is"—but a selection and rejection, the perpetual assertion of fitness against unfitness, a constant making of inequality. To our feelings, and to our mind (unless it become a word without intellectual and emotional meaning) the *divine* is the supremely desirable. According to our condition that desirable has inevitably shifted quarters, but it has always been, and must always be, the exceptional, the exceptional which becomes, perhaps, by dint of our

seeking it, the rule; our desires being set free to seek something new, some other rare thing which we would fain make common. And in this way our spiritual progress has consisted, most probably, in the gradual relegation to the obscure, half-conscious, automatic side of our nature of instincts and functions which have once been uppermost; in the gradual raising of the level of the desirable, the contemplated, above the necessities of the moment and the body, above the interest of the *ego*. There is no place for democracy *à la* Whitman in the soul; its law is co-ordination, subordination, hierarchy.

The "Theories of Anarchy and Law," of Mr. H. B. Brewster, is unknown to the public just in proportion, I should say, to its merits. It takes no ordinary reader to appreciate its subtlety of analysis and boldness of hypotheses. And the marvellous impartiality which sees every side of every argument equally, and refrains from all judgment, is positively distressing even to the most admiring reader, who seeks in vain for something to attack or to espouse, who gropes, blinded by excess of light, for the unclutchable personality of the author. Behind which of the speakers of these dialogues shall we look for him? At which moment does he shift from the one side to the other? Is Mr. Brewster on the whole for or against intellectual and ethical Nihilism? Be this as it may, the book is on the whole a perfect gospel of anarchy, because, in the first place, the anarchical opinions, although they represent only one quarter of the doctrines represented, are those we are least accustomed to and consequently most impressed by; and because, in the second place,

the very impartiality, the refusal to decide, to commend and condemn, leaves an impression of the utter vanity of all formula and all system.

It is, therefore, only as an expression of anarchic tendencies that I wish, in this connection, to mention the book.\* And principally because it affords, in the most remarkable form, the key-note of what I should call the transcendental theology of anarchy. I use the word theology once more advisedly. For Mr. Brewster has separated from the various practical and speculative items which held it in solution, and distilled into the subtlest essence, a transcendental principle which\* lurks, however unperceived, in all anarchic writings, a transcendental equivalent of the old Persian and Manichean dualism. At the end of all the doubts, doubts about ideals, duties, institutions, formulas, whether they are good or evil, arises the final doubt: have we a right to prefer good to evil? Does the universe live only in the being of God; does the universe not live equally in the being of Satan? The pessimistic philosophers of our century have accustomed us to conceive of forces in creation which are irreconcilable with benevolence. The later Darwinism is training us to perceive that in the process of evolution there is, alongside of the selection of the fittest, the rendering even unfitter of the initially unfit, degenerative tendencies as well as tendencies to adaptation. We have had to admit that destruction is a factor in all construction. The doubt arises, may not destruction be just as great a power as construction? Not as its servant, but as its rival, its equal. Are we not Pharisees in condemning

all persons and instincts unsuitable, forsooth, to the purposes of our race and civilisation, when those persons and instincts are as much realities as any others? Are we not Philistines in condemning all views of life which do not square with our particular intellectual organisation? Is not what we call evil a reality, and does chaos perhaps not exist as truly as order? Shall we not recognise the great dualism?

By no means. We are so constituted that evil cannot please nor chaos satisfy us; and our constitution must be, for us, the law of the universe. For we conceive the universe only in terms of our own existence, and the qualities we attribute to it are only modes of our own feeling. All we can be sure of about good and evil, chaos and order, is that they are conceptions of ours. Are they conceptions, and if so, to what extent corresponding, of anything else? We cannot tell. What we call forces of destruction and disorder are such to us; nay, they are forces perhaps only to us; it is only through our own aversion that we know of destruction and disorder at all. The origin of all such doubts, and their solution also, lies in the nature of the doubter. In the little world which our faculties, our spiritual and practical needs, as well as our bodily senses, have created for us out of the infinite unknown universe, it is our human instincts which decide, as they have determined, everything. And among the ideas they have set on foot they decide for good against evil, for order against chaos.

These discussions on anarchy and law, these

struggles between what we have and what we want, should give a result more practically important than even the most important application in practice ; for, in our life, a habit of feeling and thinking, an attitude, is of wider influence than a rule of conduct. The attempt to verify our moral compass, the deliberate readiness to do so, might result in the safest kind of spiritual peace. For, to be able to see in all that we call *bad*, *wrong*, *false*, the cause and effect, the immense naturalness and inevitableness, its place in the universe as distinguished from its place in our own liking or convenience ; to be able to face *fact* as *fact*, as something transcending all momentary convenience or pleasantness ; yet at the same time to preserve our human preferences, to exercise our human selection all the more rigidly because we know that it is *our* selection, reality offering more, but we accepting only what we choose ; such a double attitude would surely be the best. It would be the only attitude thoroughly true, just, kind, and really practical, giving us peace and dignity and energy for struggle without hoodwinking or arrogance. It would be more respectful both to our own nature, and to the nature which transcends ours, to recognise that what mankind wants it wants because it is mankind ; and to leave off claiming from the universe conformity to human ideals and methods.

The sense of this (however vague) has been furthered by occasional fortunate conditions of civilisation, and it is, most probably, constitutional in certain happily balanced natures. It is what gives the high serenity to men of the stamp of Plato and



Goethe and Browning ; they can touch everything, discuss everything, understand the reason of everything, yet remain with preferences unaltered. Perhaps we may all some day attain, by employing equally our tendencies to doubt and our tendencies to believe, to such a fearless, yet modest, recognition of what is, and also of what we wish it to be.

EMERSON AS A TEACHER OF  
LATTER-DAY TENDENCIES



## EMERSON AS A TEACHER OF LATTER-DAY TENDENCIES

### I

IN the following notes upon Emerson no attempt has been made to assign him his place in the kingdom of thought and expression, either by tracing his spiritual generations and kinships, or by comparing him, quality by quality—so much more or less of intuition, logic, synthesis and analysis—with the thinkers who seem measurable in the same scales. Still less, to account for the peculiarities of the work by the peculiarities of the man, of his nation and times.

The relation I should wish to set forth is that between Emerson's writings, and one of their readers—myself. For the relation between writer and reader, where such really exists, implies the originating of ideas and states of feeling such as did not exist in either reader or writer taken singly, the latent peculiarities of the one being vitalised and altered by the fruitful contact of the other. The thought, the feeling thus generated may be far from uncommon, and may be shortlived and comparatively barren ; but it is an organic particle of that vast, fluctuating mass of spiritual life whence all thought and all feeling arise, and with-

out which the most creative minds could not create, or, could they create, would be creative to no purpose.

This action and reaction, give and take, between reader and writer is worthy of attention quite apart from the value of the ideas which it may have brought forth. It would afford another demonstration of the relativity of all judgment, of the incompleteness of all definite views, and it would constitute an additional lesson, very wholesome for our conceit and impatience, on the poverty and faultiness of each individual's contribution to truth, as compared with the excellence of the unindividual mass of thought made up of such contributions.

As regards Emerson, I am aware of his exceptional influence in maturing my thought. And it is my impression that in return for the partial change he has thus effected—since only partial changes are valuable, implying by their partiality the presence of some original tendencies—I have been able to alter some of his main ideas in a way such as to render them more fruitful: clearing them of certain sterilising excrescences, and grafting them on to the living thought of our days. My reader, in his turn, will alter and prune and graft my alterations, or cast them aside as useless, or useless at least to himself.

But be this as it may, my notes will be valuable in showing one of the ways, in which reader and writer unite to form a something new. For it will be visible in them that Emerson helped me first by arousing considerable antagonism, and that the reaction against his antagonistic peculiarities so helped to clear my own ideas, that I grew eventually able to approach him

with impartiality, to separate deliberately what disfigured him in my eyes ; and, having put aside these disfiguring portions, to enter his presence in a mood worthy of making me receive the inestimable gifts of his soul.

## II

Emerson, like Ruskin, like Tolstoi, belongs to the category, once numerous, now daily diminishing in number, of mystics and symbolists. Their method is innate in him, if we may call method that which implies the absence rather than the presence of intellectual discipline : truth is perceived by flashes, in luminous points amid the darkness, without any attempt to work it out, to shed the light of one opinion upon the neighbouring opinion, to obtain a continuity of solid, illuminated ground.

He openly deprecates any attempts at consecutiveness, he warns mankind against wanting to do that which cannot be done without the wanting, against wishing to be or to have what they are not or have not already. He is the apostle of spontaneity ; in his consuming passion for reality he confounds the deliberate with the artificial, and the artificial with the futile. The benefit of Emerson's advice on this head depends on the recognition that there are some things we can never do, some things we can never have or be—namely, all those of whose nature there is not in ourselves already a germ, a possibility. The danger of Emerson's advice consists in making us believe that the actual is the potential, that what we are not we cannot become, that

what we have not yet got we may never obtain. There will be a distinct gain in spontaneity, which spontaneity means success, and a diminution of the kind of effort which means only failure, despair, or, worst of all, the wasting, the spoiling of what is valuable. There will be a much smaller number of shams, and a greater proportion of satisfactory products ; which means an increase of happiness and what conduces thereto. But, on the other hand, there will be a waste of potentialities, of the things that might have been ; and therewith a great loss in completeness, thoroughness, balance, and in all things intellectual, of lucidity and efficacy for application to practice. The world will not be in thorough working order, since working order implies co-ordination, co-operation, compromise. Things will be comparatively spasmodic, and, in a measure, sterile. This absence of lucidity, this sporadic, sterile tendency, is visible in Emerson himself ; it is the drawback of his doctrine, of his practice of spontaneity.

Yet it is doubtful whether it is not better thus—better that the exaggerations and shortcomings should be corrected by Emerson's readers than forestalled by Emerson himself. It is possible that with men of this mystic-symbolical temper the greater lucidity and practical applicability (since practice is based on reality, and reality can be attained only by being lucid) might fail to compensate for the diminution in suggestiveness and directness. The prophetically enounced thought works its way deeper, perhaps, into the mind of the hearer, when it is such as does not graze off the surface. It sets the mind a-thinking (when itself thinkable)

more than the carefully argued thesis. So it is well worth while to let the prophet babble occasional nonsense, talk, like the earliest Christians and the Irvingites, in gibberish tongues, for the sake of the great words of inspiration which drop, ever and anon, from his superhuman lips.

But connection in our ideas, the quality of being *thought out*, is valuable for more than itself. The act of bringing our ideas into mutual dependence shows us also which of them are worthless : the union of a fallacy with a truth, even if it produce no immediate jar, can produce but a vicious consequence. We begin to doubt of our premiss on seeing its untenable conclusions or side-issues. Here, then, comes in the danger of the intellectual methods of Emerson, of all prophetic, clairvoyant, as distinguished from prosaically logical, thinkers. These men can throw out a falsehood or mere faulty approximation to truth, without being warned of what they are doing. Nay, worse, they can hit upon a truth without that truth destroying its corresponding error. In this system (or absence thereof) of isolating ideas, everything is safe—the good and the bad can rest at peace ; the good does not inconvenience the bad, nor the bad inconvenience the good. The thinker is never called upon to make a choice among his thoughts, he may keep them all. Hence it is that these clairvoyant thinkers give us so much of truth swimming in so much of falsehood, or *vice versâ*. Hence, worst of all, that they will be so serenely unconscious of the practical dangers of their teachings. The metaphysical Schoolmen of the Middle Ages kept up the standard



of thinking and living ; while the mystics, their superiors in mind and in feeling, very frequently debased it exceedingly.

And, moreover, this resting satisfied with one's spontaneous intentions, as distinguished from all attempts to connect and correct them, this habit of never comparing one's conceptions of things with each other must result in a virtual refusal to examine either facts or other men's views. No sense of intellectual responsibility can be generated by modes of thought so casual and disconnected. The thinker keeps his ideas apart, so they never clash ; he keeps them separate also from their own consequences, from the thought of others, from the inconvenient testimony of reality. He clears all around him ; and soon comes to be the only mind, the only thought in the universe : the universe becomes the image of his views of it ; and all save the intellect ceases to exist.

It is most curious to observe how Emerson, whose exquisite moral and æsthetic sensibility is revealed in a thousand fragmentary utterances, uproots all human sympathies and preferences in laying out his stony garden of the intellect, but leaves them everywhere about, to bloom delightfully—little unnoticed heaps or earth's weeds in those fine concentric paths and beds of intellectual spar and gravel. Thus, in the famous essay on "Friendship," that most extraordinary revelation of a passionate personality, he affects to consider the friend as a mere intellectual excitement (all is over, he tells us, once curiosity is satisfied) ; and even in placing his austere bounds to such intellectual voluptuousness, he speaks only of his own self-respect,

his own spiritual temperance, and the results of indulgence, or refraining upon his *own* soul, with never a reference to the feelings, the poor soft heart of the other party. Learn to check your fancies in friendship, to refrain from your friend, to do without ; learn to expect no reciprocity. Why ? Lest in your hurry you may engage another's permanent affection where you cannot give your own ?—lest in your habit of constant spiritual union you become selfish, exacting, or, in your desire for reciprocation, you grow unable to give ~~save~~ where you receive ? For not one of these reasons. No ; merely because of the risk to your intellectual independence, your intellectual integrity and security. One would think, were it not for the evidence of a hundred scattered utterances of most delicate lovingkindness, that Emerson was a fierce intellectual egoist like Abelard, writing just such letters to Heloise, answering her prayer for one gentle word with chapters of theology, in the suppressed savageness of a mediæval ascetic, who sees with disgust something that has once inflamed his senses but never touched his heart.

And similarly he mentions pain, not as a horror whose existence all around we must for ever struggle against—a horror the thought of which, as existing in others, is almost as bad as its reality in ourselves—but as a possible factor in producing the man of pure intellect—the *justum et tenacem propositi virum*.

For Emerson is perpetually repeating that all life is in the intellect—nay, all reality. Hence a possibility of interest only in cause and effect—in the *why things are*, not the *how things should be*. Hence all matters

being referable only to Intellect, Intellect—or rather, an intellect corresponding to his own—is evidently God. And hence a perpetual worship, sometimes slightly savouring of Moloch's, of a Godhead which, in its apparent indifference to evil and suffering, is indeed but the mist-magnified shadow of Emerson's own Olympian mind.

All things, therefore, are the symbol of Divinity, the forms in which the Creative force chooses, Proteus-like, to mask. And for this reason nature, all that is and can be, is noble.

But Emerson is meanwhile the sport of a delusion : he conceives that what is taking place within himself is happening also without. He is watching his own mind, shadowed on the outer world, passing from object to object ; and he fancies that this vague and magnified himself must be God. Thus the divinity—for Emerson the divinity passing into and through all things—is not the power by virtue of which things are, but in reality the power by virtue of which he perceives their existence. For Emerson, though often insisting on the part played by the perceiving mind in all matters of perception, refuses to consider that in the same way as the structure of the eye, which makes a straight stick seem crooked in the water, so also the quality and condition of the mind which perceives nature, is a fact *inside* nature, and not outside it. If Emerson had any habits of systematic thought, he could not avoid taking notice of this fact ; he would be obliged, once having suspected their nature, to examine methodically his own mental operations. But being unhampered by any system, he can afford to look

away from any fact which might disturb him ; and so, at the convenient moment, when it would have become clear that thought cannot—any more than the senses can—handle absolute reality, he looks away from himself, and looks in the direction of what he calls God. Here, by no metaphysical sleight of hand, but by merely dropping the subject and picking it up elsewhere, he has momentarily got rid of the identity between the universal mind and his own. This intellect, self-created and all-creating, is now no longer the mind of Emerson, moulding matter into so many disguises for itself : it is the mind of the world. And who could deny that the mind of the world, in so far as mind of the world, might sport with matter, or call it up as a mere phantom out of nothingness ? The purely intellectual man, impatient of all that is not intellect, revolting from the thought that anything save intellect can have reality, does thus attribute his own temper to the Godhead—the Godhead with whom he fancies that, in following any chain of cause and effect, he must be united and identified.

Therefore [attempting to systematise what Emerson has thrown out in separate statements] the divinity, inasmuch as the mere magnified reflexion of the individual intellect, is necessarily what that individual interest happens to be : that which makes or perceives all cause and effect. And so it comes to pass that cause and effect, being made by the mind identical with God, and hence by God Himself, become the Godlike ; and the Godlike, Emerson has been accustomed to think, is the same as the holy, the virtuous. In short, *all that is is right*, not as Pope imagined, because it was

necessarily made to be right, but merely because to *be right* is the same as to *be, because something else has been before and conditioned it*. "It is dislocation and detachment from the life of God," we read in the Essay on the poet, "that makes things ugly; and the poet who reattaches things to nature and the whole—re-attaching even artificial things and revelations of nature to nature by a deeper insight—disposes very easily of disagreeable facts." This, extended into less pithy language, means merely that all is right so long as it is understood; and that the scientific thinker, whom Emerson misnames Poet, being able to demonstrate that even such things as most shock our constitution are yet the inevitable results of certain other things, can give us the satisfaction of seeing cause and effect and thereby set our minds at rest about such "disagreeable facts" as it foolishly feels annoyed at. Whatever is, being cause and effect, is an emanation of the divinity, who is also cause and effect. And, as Emerson has been brought up to connect morality with what other men call God (meaning thereby any of a variety of things, but *not* cause and effect), Emerson perceives that cause and effect must be moral. "Since everything in nature," he says, "answers to a moral power, if any phenomenon remains brute and dark, it is because the corresponding faculty in the observer is not yet active"—that is to say that the "brute and dark" phenomenon is not yet disposed of as cause and effect. Thus to the connecting, reasoning mind, cause and effect having become divine, came actually to mean morality. The evil fact is comfortably settled once we have recognised its origin, and pain and death, disease

and degradation, may link hands with whatever is fair and noble here below, and revolve mystically round the Divinity and the divine human being in a rhythm of causation and logic, making soul-music of *is and was* !

Nay, further—for it is easier sometimes for the intellect to endure evil than that which, being the reverse of intellect, is more antagonistic to it—Emerson formulates what has been blunderingly put into practice by Whitman, and condenses into a few mystical words what Whitman extends into grotesque rhapsodies of mixed beauty and dirt. “All the facts of the animal economy,” says Emerson, “sex, nutriment, gestation, birth, growth, are symbols of the passage of the world into the soul of man.”

But the soul of man, not being, as Emerson takes for granted, exclusively devoted to logic, will not receive into itself with equanimity some of the symbolical items. The soul of man protests against the contact of foulness and baseness, injustice and pain, however much legitimated by logic. The soul will not be satisfied with a divinity that governs mere cause and effect—it requires a moral, an æsthetic rule.

In this fashion does the most cunning reader of the mind's strange palimpsest forget for the time being some of the mind's most striking rubrics. This delicate expert in exquisite nature leaves out of his reckoning some of nature's most essential qualities. He overlooks in his main philosophy what is the burden of all his detail teaching—namely, that we require for our spiritual satisfaction much more than the mere

apprehension of cause and effect ; that, besides the wish to understand why things are, there is in us the more imperious want to make things as they should be. He puts aside what elsewhere he perpetually postulates, that, even as we have physical senses which are disgusted by certain tastes and smells, despite all explanations of their chemical reasons, so likewise we have spiritual instincts which, despite all possible explanations of how and why, will always be revolted by whatever is unjust, cruel, ugly, or gross. There is in us the logical faculty which reduces all things to cause and effect, making them all equally important or unimportant, according as the mind which perceives is keen or languid. But there are also the æsthetic and moral faculties which are essentially selecting, preferring, and which arrange all things in a long scale whose bottom means abhorrence or contempt, and whose top the fervidest love and admiration. These and these only are qualifying activities ; the mere logical intellect can only recognise and connect, it cannot judge. It is not, thanks to the intellect, that anything, that "sex, gestation, nutriment," &c., can be made high or low according as it is, or is not, viewed in connection with the scheme of creation ; since the intellect knows neither high nor low. If a subject can seem now gross and now pure, now trivial and now dignified, it is because our qualifying functions, moral or æsthetic, recognise the superior desirableness or rareness of the intellectual perception as distinguished from the bodily one ; because they have decided that if there is enough and too much of the contemplation of some matters by the brute, there is not enough of this

contemplation by the scientific man or the moralist. And who tells us that the man of science or the moralist is nobler than the brute? Not the instinct of mere causal relation, but the instinct which says: "I want more of this, less of that"; the instinct which brings things into relation, not with what Emerson worships as God, but with what Emerson is for ever overlooking—Man.

The fact is that Emerson, in his process of forgetting everything that is not mind, has forgotten human nature; in his supposed union with God he has left Man in the lurch. His grave optimism is founded on a disregard for man's existence; when he is talking about man, with the marvellous intuition so oddly at variance with his theoretic onesidedness, he is often pessimistic enough.

Having perceived that all things proceed with logical correctness, and having identified his own perception of cause and effect with the creative act, Emerson has judged that all that is, is right. Thus in the universe where God and Emerson—strange mystic dualism!—sit alone, willing and understanding, understanding and willing. But introduce into this universe *man*, and the aspect of matters changes. Those things which affect Emerson and God as right—that is to say, as *being*—affect man sometimes as agreeable, sometimes as disagreeable; sometimes as beautiful, sometimes as atrocious. The current of intelligent approbation between the Universal Mind and the Mind of Emerson is interrupted now and then by a sudden movement of this new agent, man, standing, as it were, half-way—movements meaning



joy, admiration, pain, horror, despair. Why so? Simply because this new agent, *man*, perceives things according to a new standard, the standard of his own preservation and happiness. Right and wrong mean no longer intelligible and unintelligible; they mean that which makes for man's interests or against them. An æsthetic and ethical standard evolves, by which it is quite impossible to continue considering all things as equal, merely because they are equally willed by God; that is to say, speaking objectively and without mystical metaphor, because they can be equally understood by Emerson. Instead of the cause, man asks after the effect; and that things are and must be merely results, in certain cases, in rendering things more odious in his eyes. Hence, with the appearance of man, the scheme of pure optimism falls to the ground; and Emerson, systematic in one matter, and obeying an unerring instinct, does all he can to keep man out of the way; Man, be it understood, in so far as he is more than a mere fragment of the Universal Mind, a mere molecule of causal perception. We hear, therefore, of pain and sorrow only as we might hear of hot or cold; and of justice and injustice rather as intellectual questions—virtually openness, or the reverse, to conviction. Attempts at reform—that is to say, at diminishing or equalising the human burden of woes—are treated as intellectual experiments, movements interesting in their symmetrical equilibrium with other movements. All is quite regular and lucid, hence right and noble; and thus a great lid of intellectual optimism descends to silence the unrest and dissatisfaction of man.

## III

• The Nemesis comes. Its name is *Unreality*, and this should have been the title, and not *Experience*, of Emerson's most wonderful essay. The punishment, or rather (since I do not, like Emerson, believe in a neatly adjusting Providence) the inevitable result of reducing all things to their merely intellectual aspect, is that, ever and anon, the man who has so reduced them will awake to the sense of reduction to nothingness. For intellectual relations exist only in our thought. This is merely a mode of grouping, which we apply to them without affecting their actual existence; and hence it is that the man who shall have viewed things merely in such relations must, sooner or later, feel the lack of reality. For Emerson, when Emerson dogmatizes, the individual is nothing, the type everything; and similarly, the separate, sensible moment, yesterday, to-morrow, to-day, is nothing, and the balance struck between them is the important. Thus optimism is saved; injustice and pain are lost to sight in a disproportionate abstraction. But reality recoups itself; for in reality there happens to exist only the individual, the moment existing independent and outside ourselves. And so, in the intervals of speculation, when the man re-becomes a man and compares his emotions with those of his neighbours, Emerson discovers that in his search for reality in thought he has lost it in fact. A passage in that essay on *Experience* reads curiously like the confession of some great neoplatonician thaumaturge returning to

earth after making himself an abstract creature, and finding that all things elude his clutch :

“What opium is instilled into all disaster ! It shows formidable as we approach it, but there is at last no rough and rasping friction, but the most slippery, sliding surfaces. We fall soft on a thought. . . . There are moods in which we court suffering, in the hope that there, at least, we shall find reality, strange peaks and edges of truth. But it turns out to be scene-painting and counterfeit. \*The only thing grief has taught me is to know how shallow it is. That, like all the rest, plays about the surface, and never introduces me into the reality, for contact with which we would even pay the costly price of sons and lovers.”

Such a sense of unreality must come to all of us at certain times of our spiritual life, particularly during the years when we slowly replace with the experience of ourselves the borrowed or ready-made notions of life which had to do duty in our youth. But it is a phase ; and in learning that all things are evanescent, a healthy human being learns also that this condition of soul is the most evanescent itself : a state of trance from which the least rough shock or warm breath will rouse us. But Emerson would have us think that this condition of semi-paralysis in all save the logical faculty is the normal and permanent matter ; probably because he is taking for granted the possibility of extirpating from our natures everything besides this merely logical perception. It is grotesque, and in a measure pathetic, to read after this Emerson's denunciation of the fatalism involved in a materialistic explanation of the mind's

peculiarities—"given such an embryo, such a history must follow. *On this platform one lives in a sty of sensualism and would soon come to suicide.*" Yet what suicide could be compared to the courting of pain and loss of the beloved for the sake of the rough and rasping friction of reality? And in another passage we are led to question whether, as in the case of Quietism, the transcendental platform might not easily be transformed into a *sty of sensualism* as bad as any which Emerson could attribute to materialistic influence. "Saints are sad, because they behold sin (even when they speculate) from the point of view of the conscience, and not of the intellect—a confusion of thought. Sin, seen from the thought, is a diminution or loss; seen from the conscience or will, it is pravity or *bad*. The intellect names it shade, absence of light, and no essence. The conscience must feel it as essence, essential evil. . . ." For whence should come *conscience*, this odd Puritan interloper, in a world which is full, every nook and cranny, of the universal creative essence, of the Supreme Cause and Effect, knowing neither good nor evil—in a world full of what Emerson calls God, and void, utterly void, of the sentient and suffering individual, concrete man? But Emerson is, fortunately, no real systematic thinker, and is, essentially, a Puritan, full of the sound morality of Mosaic law, and morality formulating as God's will the practical interests of man. So we hear no more about the reasons which allow philosophers to differ from saints in not looking sadly at evil. And, on the contrary, among all the qualities metamorphosed into *essences*, and all the adjectives transfigured and *enthroned*

as metaphysical entities, each with its crown of stars or of city walls, its attributes in hand and under foot—we find, foremost truthfulness, chastity and justice. Nay, by one of those bold but adorable contradictions which save the soul of transcendentalists and mystics from the hell of indifference—we are especially informed, in the curious essay called the *Over Soul*, that the soul of man, that inlet of the universal mind, is filled with the tide of the universe's divine life more particularly when it perceives justice or conceives heroism.

This mysticism, this determination to reduce all things to intellect, this violent clutching at the cause behind phenomena, gives Emerson, like Ruskin, a certain mediæval character, not usually to be met nowadays, save among theological writers: he is related to the Abbot Joachim, to Abelard, to the compilers of herbals and bestiaries; he has a quaint look, quaint and delightful, of being a belated brother of Sir Thomas Browne or Burton of the *Anatomy*. Montaigne (the man he so ardently admires) might as well never have existed for him; and the other masters of inductive thought—Locke, Voltaire, Hume, the eighteenth century with its strong level vision, its materialisation of Nature, its enthroning of man—have passed without affecting him. Modern science he distinctly turns away from; he has a hankering after visionaries and allegorical expounders, even the trashiest. The names of Jacob Boehm and of Swedenborg are perpetually returning to him; he believes Jesus to have been a mortal man, but he might easily grant some transcendent quality to Apollonius of Tyana. He tends to find a symbol in everything, a

mysterious "Open, sesame!" He cannot be satisfied with a thing meaning only its poor self, serving its obvious purpose. Every analogy is to him an actual causal connection, every metaphor which his fancy perceives a sort of sign-manual of God. He has, to the highest degree, the symbolic superstition. For him the world exists by virtue of certain formulas, which are not so much shorthand generalisations of man as actual creative spells of God : system, dualism, the principle of opposites and compensation, and sex. There must be a mysterious equilibrium everywhere—an evil for every good, a good for every evil, an answer for every question, a satisfaction for every craving, a loss for every gain, a bitter for every sweet, a female for every male. And do what you will you cannot alter things, since, by such a mysterious law, as matter displaced on one side must reappear on the other, so also the happiness given to Tom must be taken from Harry. That the nature of one thing or case being different from that of another there will be a corresponding difference of rule and action, never occurs to Emerson. He strips all things into a sort of unqualified, non-existent nakedness, and then calls it unity and identity.

And yet, despite all this, Emerson remains one of the thinkers who can do most for us moderns ; whose teachings, if put into practice, could carry us through the greatest number of temptations and dangers. It is with Emerson's writings as with the sacred books of ancient times : we must separate what is due to imperfect knowledge, to superstitious habits of mind, and consequently mischievous, or worthless and deci-

duous, from that which is due to some great intuition of truth, some special energy of soul, such as is given to exceptional races, or moments or individuals—immortal gifts whose usefulness will never suffer a change. And, as we find in all such writings, bibles of all nations, sacred and profane, so also in Emerson this worthless, changing, deciduous part has received its excessive importance from the very vital and immortal part which it has served to deface; thus in Plato and St. Paul, the “Imitation of Christ;” and, among the prophets of to-day, in Ruskin and Tolstoi.\*

The vital, vitalising intuition in Emerson is a dualism, closely connected: the intuition of the worthlessness of unreality for our happiness and progress; and the intuition of the supreme power, for our happiness and progress, of that portion which we call soul. Such intuitions are rarely new. Antiquity knew these of Emerson, as India knew those of Christ and his mediæval followers; but they are born afresh, as it were, with new vigour and efficacy, in a new mind; and, at each new incarnation they are obliged, alas, to assume the foolish costume and habits—nay, the very maladies—which belong to thought at the moment of the new birth. In the case of Emerson, the intuition of the supreme value of reality, and of the soul’s most marvellous powers of expansion and adaptation, of its unique capacity for embracing all things in the acts of comprehension, imagination, and sympathy—these vital thoughts were defined, hampered and compressed, by a cheap transcendentalism: the metaphysics of Germany adulterated by the shoddy science, the cheap mysticism of America. And

the divine strength of his mind may seem, at first sight, to have been employed merely in carrying the weight, in filling up the forms, of the threadbare garments of Dr. Faust, and the tinsel garments of some less philosophic wizard. Let us strip them off ; and we shall see the Titan beneath.

We have seen how Emerson has got himself a pocket religion by making the human soul consubstantial and co-extensive with God, and the life of the soul identical with the perception of cause and effect, so that, while Jehovah says, "I Am," Emerson fulfils his spiritual duties by repeating, in various forms of words, "Thou art." Also, how, in his dread of materialism and hedonism, he has attempted to measure phenomena of sensation, emotion, and æsthetic perception by a mechanism for registering cause and effect which is as unfit to register their quality as a pair of scales is unfit to measure the degree of heat, or a barometer the intensity of the colour blue. Similarly, we shall find that the same spiritualistic bias has led Emerson to repeat, very often, the stale Stoical sayings of the self-sufficingness of the mind, the unimportance of circumstance, the indifference to momentary pain and pleasure.

The soul, indeed, can be trained to considerable indifference : it can be rendered obtuse to pain and pleasure, to impressions and affections ; religious asceticism has always boasted, in the words of Molière's Orgon : " Et je verrais mourir frère, enfans, mère et femme, que je m'en soucieraï tout comme de cela ! "

But such indifference means, not uniting ourself closer with Nature and the Infinite, but cutting loose



from them on one whole side. The human creature, no longer enjoying, no longer sympathising, no longer loving, would hold on to the universe only by his reason. The wind would blow, trees rustle, waters murmur, hills be blue and fields green, and people around be beautiful, brilliant or kind, sorrowing or clinging, without his being any the wiser. Nay, the wiser, if it be wisdom merely to know the necessities and sequences of things without knowing the things themselves; but neither the happier nor the more conducive to others' happiness. It would be good practice for dying, as, indeed, Roman Stoicism was the school where men learned to escape from tyranny by suicide of body and soul. Such Stoicism is the folly of philosophers, the cowardice of heroes, the blasphemy of those who, believing in gods, reject their good gifts for fear of their bad; it is afraid of the universe, and tries to look at it, as Perseus at the head of Medusa, only in the reflected image. This excess of intellectualism, thinking to limit all wants to those of the logical intellect, would defeat its own end; for what should the intellect contemplate and discuss, if all were reduced to abstractions, if things existed only as ideas, if the moment, the individual, the sensation, the emotion, ceased to be?

#### IV

Such dogmas as these cannot form the basis of Emerson's teachings, much as he tries to deduce the one from the other, any more than the dogmas of celestial caprice and barbarity, of the Fall, the bloody

Atonement and eternal Hell could be the rational foundation for the religion of mercy and love of Francis of Assisi. There is, fortunately for the world, a higher logic, guessing at the relations between dogmas and facts, which works divine havoc in the smaller logic connecting one theory with another; the soul frees itself from the tyranny of lies by stealthy self-contradiction. The logical consequences of Emerson's intellectual pantheism would be to deny (what man, according to the Hebrews, never learned from the great *Ain*) the distinction of good and evil; to accept only the bare fact of existence, of emanation from the All-powerful. Why, therefore, preach heroism and the search for truth? Why struggle against unreality, hypocrisy, appearances? Why denounce the waste of effort, the darning in words, supineness, vanity, and all the tissues of *wine and of dreams*?

In reality because, however unconsciously to himself, Emerson was judging them worthless by the purely human instinct of affinity for certain qualities, and repulsion for certain others, by the purely utilitarian intuition of what is desirable or undesirable for man and man's race. And because the main energy of his mind, his originality and inspiration, consisted in an instinctive craving, despite the mere intellectual satisfaction in cause and effect, after a life more large, more varied, more transferable from object to object, from mind to mind — a true life of the soul, which includes the life of the sensations and emotions, which is based on realities, and which implies happiness.

For it is this which renders Emerson's writings so efficacious in one's life, so charged with vital principle;

this which, entering into our torpid thought, fertilises it, makes it expand, alter, and bear fruit. No writer can have a greater influence in certain lives, yet no writer, surely, was ever more chary of criticisms and rules of conduct, of what, in most cases, makes the moralist. Indeed you might sometimes think he had never lived, never felt, made choice, acted, nay existed among real individuals (for all the passionate hints of the chapters on love and on friendship) but only among such abstractions of mankind as his own representative men; among ideals of human beings not to be touched, but to be criticised. The human efficacy of Emerson's teachings lies in his constant insistence upon the necessity of widening existence by increased contact with reality on all sides, and of such reality being apprehended by the mind, the sympathies, the imagination, as well as by the senses. For the narrowest life is the one into which there enter the fewest ideas — the animal's, the child's, the savage's life of the mere sensation, the mere moment; and the next narrowest is the base man's life of the mere ego, the appetites of to-day projected into to-morrow, the appetites of others employed to gratify his own. Unselfishness is a widening of ourselves by giving equal rank to the pleasures and rights of others—that is to say, to what is after all an intellectual conception, an idea to us, not a thing we can taste or touch. Justice, mercy, truth—those great abstractions covering the greater happiness of the greater number, and to which nobler men and women must sacrifice good for themselves and their neighbours—justice, mercy, truth, are more than ever intellectual existences, transcending our sensation and

experience. And the logical, the æsthetic appreciations which unite us to the world beyond man, which add to our own the life we understand in all phenomena, the life which we love in some of them, are still more obviously, an enlarging of ourselves through the enlarging of our mind. For the mind embraces all, while the body can hold but little. Hence a constant regard for our possibilities from the intellectual standpoint, a constant preference of the life of the soul, life in all times and places, over the life, limited by moment and place, of the body ; an insistence upon the life which unites us to all things instead of enclosing us within ourselves. Such a view of existence must be to the highest degree vitalising and fruitful. This would not be the case were Emerson the mere ordinary intellectual man, submitting to the intellect only the things which are obviously of the intellect, and leaving to the appetites, to the emotions, to the vanities all the rest. For Emerson gives unto Cæsar only the copper penny, and claims for God the kingdom of the earth. Emerson asks not what the mind can make of books, art, and its other notorious belongings ; but what the mind can make of life as a whole : of love, friendship, practical efforts, political struggles, domestic arrangements—of everything. To him the real life is that of the soul : the life, so to speak, at headquarters, to which all other subordinate lives do but bring their necessary tribute of well-being, of experience, of sensation, of facts. He knows that there is in the noblest creatures a sort of uppermost consciousness to which all lower ones lead ; which is as homogeneous as they are heterogeneous, as persistent as they are fleet-

ing ; in which our sensations, actions, affections are multiplied tenfold by those of other men, of other times and places ; and where, in an endless chain of pattern, everything is connected with something else, everything transmuted into something different. Therefore all the things which constitute our ordinary daily consciousness, Emerson examines ; asking of what use they may be in this great uppermost consciousness or existence ; accepting and rejecting in accordance with this standard. Hence he is characterised and takes rank of nobility, mainly by a constant scrutinising, unflinching elimination of unrealities, of activities and habits which bring only wear and tear and produce neither truth nor good nor beauty. A great part of his philosophy consists in the separation of futile efforts from fruitful ; another, in showing how much more we may gain by letting things act for us than by squirming our souls out in unnecessary action. He teaches that it is not by the books which we read, the men whom we speak to, the stones and tree-trunks which we pull about, that we are increasing our life, still less by the money we amass or the complications we establish ; but only by as much of the books as we understand, of the men as we love, of the talk as we wisely consider, of the materialities we combine to give us health, more peace, and more power of being realities. In fact, it is only by as much as is vital and fertilised in our life that our life is improved. This great purveyor of realities wherewith to nourish our highest life is for ever warning us against the adulteration of things intellectual and moral, teaching us to separate the stones from the bread, to

throw away the husks and the rind. He is no hater of tradition, even of convention ; because he recognises that both of them may contain a portion of life. But once that life has left the tradition and convention he has no patience but sweeps them away, be they called by the solemnest names of virtue and honour. Hence his deep sympathy, idealist and transcendentalist as he is, despiser of the gross and lover of the spiritual, with the *terre à terre* scepticism of Montaigne ; for that scepticism is one of the most potent agents for the removal of rubbishy spurious fact and spurious thought. Hence his admiration also for the coarse practicality of Napoleon, because that also means reality, real energy, sweeping away the unreal, the inert.

Those who should deliberately follow Emerson's counsels, omitting from their lives not merely what he directly advises should be omitted, but also what his whole system logically leads us to reject, would be surprised to find how much space they had left themselves, how much energy for the real life, the life of enjoyment and utility. For half of our life is spent, if not in struggling with trash, with the unreality others have burdened us with, as education, so called, religion, sociabilities, false necessities and ideals ; then in actually doing the unreal : reading books we do not understand, seeing people we do not like, doing acts which lead to nothing, or to the reverse of their intention. All great teaching, of the sort which is, so to say, prophetic and sacred, helps us to a wider life in other men, other fields and times. Half of it helps us to do so by trying to understand and love others ; the other half, and Emerson's teaching is among it, by

## EMERSON AS A TEACHER

to understand and reduce to reasonableness. This vital energy in Emerson's teaching is, given free play only if we liberate it from notions which belonged not to Emerson's mind, but to his intellectual surroundings. His transcendentalism, horrified at science and despising utility, arises, in great measure, from the old metaphysical and theological habit of regarding the soul as a ready-made, separate entity, come, Heaven knows whence, utterly unconnected with the things among which it alights, and struggling perpetually to be rid of them and return somehow to its unknown place of origin. Had Emerson suspected, as we have reason to suspect, that the soul is born of the soil, its fibre the fibre of every plant and animal, its breath the breath of every wind, its shape the space left vacant by other shapes, he would not have been obliged to arrange a purely intellectual transcendental habitation for this supposed exile from another sphere. And his intuition of a possible universal life would have been strengthened, not damaged, by the knowledge that our soul is moulded into its form—nay, takes its very quality, from surrounding circumstances; and the probability, therefore, that between the soul and its surroundings there will be a growing relation and harmony, as of product and producer, concave and convex.

# **DETERIORATION OF SOUL**





## DETERIORATION OF SOUL

“THE author of the now famous volumes on *Degeneracy* is himself a Degenerate” ; we have all of us heard, and nearly all of us passed, that obvious criticism on Max Nordau. Eccentricity, Suspiciousness of Evil, Egotism, *Idées Fixes*, Obsession by the Thought of Impurity, Lack of Human Sympathy, Confusion of Categories, Unbridled Violence of Hatred, Indiscriminate Destructiveness ; he has taught us to recognise all these as the *stigmata of degeneracy*, and we have recognised them all in himself. As a result, and following his own method towards every contemporary writer, from Tolstoi to Zola, from Ruskin to Ibsen, and from Whitman to Rossetti, we may be tempted to destroy Max Nordau’s books as pestilent rubbish, and forget his theories as insane ravings. But it is better that Nordau’s absurdities and furies should serve rather as a deterrent than an example ; that our abhorrence of his ways should teach the discrimination and justice of which he is incapable ; and, if we wish to be more reasonable than he, that we should examine and profit by what reasonableness there may be even in him.

As regards myself, I find that Nordau’s book has inspired me with a salutary terror, not merely of De-

generacy (though he is right in teaching us to be afraid of that), but of the deterioration of the soul's faculties and habits, which is the inevitable result of all intellectual injustice. And it is because Nordau himself is so striking an example of such deterioration, that I am anxious to discuss the chief facts and conclusions of his book, and to suggest certain other facts and conclusions, which, taken together, may make us appreciate the dangers we all run, if not of mental and moral degeneracy, at all events of mental and moral debasement.

## I

The new school of intellectual and moral pathology, besides assigning a physiological reason to a large amount of moral and mental imperfection, has put forward a hypothesis, according to which the immoral or idiotic person of mature age and modern times is the equivalent, through arrested growth or atavism, of the child or of the normal adult of more barbarous periods. This hypothesis is probably very crude on the biological plane, but it seems uncommonly correct and exceedingly suggestive on the moral one. Spiritual imperfection may be due, as I propose showing, to causes other than bodily; and the criminal or anti-social person need not resemble in other points either a child or a savage. But the pathological psychologists, from Maudsley and Moreau to Lombroso and Nordau, have done excellent service in pointing out that criminal instincts and anti-social behaviour are closely connected

with disease, immaturity or barbarism ; and that, contrary to the picturesque views of decadent poets and of the readers of police reports, there is nothing either refined or heroic, or in fact anything save excessively vulgar, in uncleanness and bloodthirstiness. It is very good for all of us, especially in our salad days, to learn that as regards evil, rarity does not constitute distinction ; that perverted instincts are universal among gaol-birds and maniacs ; that insensibility to the feelings of others is a frequent forerunner of imbecility, and excessive egotism a common result of visceral disturbances. Such coincidences, even where merely coincidences, are due to a great practical truth, which the school of moral pathology has put in the clearest light, to wit : that all instincts or forms of instinct detrimental to the social good, are, in a sense, deciduous and sterile ; that the world is perfectly right in considering weakness of will, unchastity of thought and word, egotism and vanity as a contagious danger to the community ; that religion and philosophy have been clairvoyant in announcing that human liberty can be attained only by controlling desire and enlarging sympathy ; that, in short, the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth will be the Kingdom of the Spirit.

This much has been formulated, made clear through analysis and example, by the new science of the soul's death and disease ; the sober works of Maudsley, of Ribot, Richet, and of Janet, the extravagant though sometimes luminous books of Lombroso, particularly the two volumes of Nordau, are full of invaluable practical suggestiveness. Unluckily the general usefulness

of the science has been diminished, it seems to me, by the tendency of the more sober among mental pathologists to limit their observations and theories to cases of thorough-paced madness, perversity, imbecility, or criminality ; and the practical lessons have been largely neutralised by the eccentric hypothesis of Lombroso and Nordau, who have separated spiritual degeneracy from spiritual deterioration, and confined it to well-defined categories of individuals. For Professor Lombroso, as everyone is aware, has developed into an elaborate system the notion of some of the earlier students of mental pathology, that special abilities are due to a disturbance of the normal psychic balance, and are therefore accompanied by intellectual or moral unsoundness ; in other words that talent is a morbid production like madness or criminality, accompanied invariably by some of their stigmata and different from either only by the accident of being, on the whole, more useful than detrimental to the community. And Professor Nordau, while explicitly rejecting Lombroso's theory of the affinity between talent, madness, and criminality, has yet put forward the notion, and illustrated it by endless example and analysis, that during the last forty years there has been degeneracy invariably manifested among literary, artistic, and philosophic workers ; while, during this period, intellectual and moral health has become the exclusive property of men of science and of mediocrities.

These theories, whether, as with Lombroso, they accept the man of talent as a fortunate nuisance ; or, as with Nordau, reject him (when a contemporary) as a dangerous attraction, these theories are not

merely scientifically questionable, but also (and this is what I wish to deal with) practically dangerous, because they seem to limit spiritual degeneracy to exceptionally inferior or exceptionally superior categories of individuals, and to reassure, quite unreasonably, the mediocre mass of mankind. According to them the immense majority need never take any thought for its psychic healthiness ; all it need do is to follow its instincts, and either to profit as much (according to Lombroso) or to suffer as little (according to Nordau) as it possibly can by the useful or noxious peculiarities of degenerates. Such are the practical conclusions derivable from the too exclusive attention given by even the soberer mental pathologists to criminals and lunatics ; still more from the identification by Lombroso and Nordau, of genius and degeneracy.

But fortunately these one-sided views, these eccentric hypotheses, have been illustrated by an enormous array of facts, and these facts, whether brought forward by Lombroso or Nordau, whether exhibited in great scientific handbooks like those of Maudsley and Ribot, or huddled together in shilling dreadfuls like Cuiller's *Frontières de la Folie*, these facts carry their own suggestion, to wit, that the stigmata of spiritual degeneracy are confined neither to criminals, lunatics, nor persons of unusual ability ; and that the average man, the dull and decent Philistine, is equally in danger of becoming an obstacle to human improvement, a centre of moral and intellectual deterioration.

Apart from the suspicion that celebrities may have been assimilated to criminals and lunatics, because like them they have become public property, and, therefore,

the *corpus vile* for pathological examination and demonstration—the study of the facts accumulated by mental pathologists, even the facts brought forward to prove the very reverse by Lombroso and Nordau, must suggest very strange thoughts to any honest and intelligent, although obscure and respectable, reader. The anecdotes snipped out of biographical dictionaries by Lombroso, and the analysis of symptoms implacably carried out by Nordau, must remind the honest Philistine of other biographical details, of other strings of peculiarities, with which he has not become acquainted in books; they must become connected and compared in his memory with stories, words, gestures, expressions of face, states of feeling, which have never fallen, which can never fall, into the hands of men of science. Little by little, many things which, on the printed page, expressed in those barbarous technical terms, had affected the reader only as so much far-fetched specialism, assume an uncomfortable air of familiarity; until at last, if he have courage to put two and two together, he must be startled, perhaps overcome, by the recognition that his neighbours, friends, family, himself, resemble Lombroso's and Nordau's degenerates in other things than genius.

I cast no doubts on the existence of thorough-paced degenerates, some in prisons, some in asylums, some walking abroad, with or without talents, and more often without than with; all scientific evidence proves that they are common, and that many of them are hopelessly incurable and through and through diseased. But when scientific evidence is accumulated in even greater bulk, is put before us irrespective of any

special hypothesis like Lombroso's or Nordau's, and when it is, moreover, brought into relation with our previous experience of life and of men, we should learn, I think, that it is dangerous to draw a hard-and-fast line between ourselves and any of our fellow creatures, even when we may be obliged, for sheer self-defence, to shut some of them up and chastise them. To make such a crude distinction does as much harm to us, who account ourselves sane, as to these whom we brand and pen up together as degenerate. For it not only vitiates our sense of likeness and unlikeness, diminishes our sympathy and justice, and wastes all that is sane and profitable, even in unsound and noxious creatures ; but it makes light of that knowledge of our present imperfection, of our possible deterioration and possible improvement, which should result from all study of the soul and the soul's diseases and dangers.

## II

*Degeneracy*: I would willingly get rid of this detestable word, leave it to mad doctors or criminalogists ; and, indeed, *degeneracy*, save as a cause, ought to be replaced in our thought by *imperfection*, since that alone is of practical consequence. But, in the study of this *imperfection*, in the search for its causes, we must come, first and foremost, to something which, for want of a better word, we must needs call degeneracy ; to the result, in a minor degree, of processes which lead, on a larger scale, to disease, madness, sterility, and death. In the continuous



and arduous adaptation of mankind to its surroundings, there is, apparently, something which stands to the gradual improvement as the friction of a machine stands to its movements: the machinery is constantly being repaired, the friction is constantly being diminished, but so far it exists, and it still represents, though in ever smaller degree, an impediment and a partial destruction. This kind of friction is what specialists call *degeneracy*. It is a form of imperfection; it is the result of imperfection, and it results in imperfection. We may roughly divide it into two kinds, sociological and biological; the first is left unconsidered by Lombroso and Nordau; the second is limited, or apparently limited, to separate categories of persons. In this disregard of sociological deterioration, in this limitation of biological deterioration, lies to my mind the fundamental mistake of both Lombroso and Nordau, a mistake which is rectified by the very facts adduced in support of their one-sided views.

The kind of deterioration which I have called sociological may be illustrated presently by an analysis of some of Nordau's own failings, their probable cause and their possible results. The other, the biological, by which I mean the deterioration accompanied by physical causes or co-results, forms the subject of Nordau's two volumes, and requires, I think, to be recognised as obtaining, not merely in the individuals stigmatised as degenerates, but in the whole of mankind of which they are, after all, but a production.

For the whole of mankind may be partially unsound, although the average of mankind may be

absolutely sound. The average or abstract totality of mankind *is* probably sound, because the imperfections of adaptation, the inability to meet the requirements of life, the hereditary, individual, or acquired biological taints are undoubtedly slight in most individuals (otherwise the individual, let alone the race, would not be there), and because the unsound portion of one individual is worked for and protected by the sound portions of other individuals; nay, because in every individual, save the lunatic, the incurable or the criminal, the sound qualities supply the deficiencies of the unsound. But the individuals composing mankind are probably all, or nearly all, imperfect or liable to become imperfect in some detail, infinitesimal, or perceptible, of their organism; were this not the case the existence of thorough-paced degeneracy, as of downright physical disease, would scarcely be conceivable; and the contagion of degeneracy, as well as the contagion of disease, would constitute no danger. Why should this be? The reason seems to me very simple: So far as we know the world's history or present condition, we cannot be certain of any human creature living in circumstances, material or social, to which he was, or is, perfectly adjusted; nay, leading a life which was not, in one way or another, too difficult for his organism, what we call, either on the bodily or the spiritual plane, unwholesome; and this imperfection of relations between the individual and his mode of existence would necessarily prevent his leaving behind him physical or spiritual off-spring, human bodies, souls, habits, notions, which were otherwise than

imperfect also ; imperfection dwindling for ever, but present always, and always liable to momentary increase. There is probably no one who inherits an absolutely flawless bodily constitution, or who leads a perfectly healthy bodily life ; but the soul is as delicate as the body, and the soul's life as difficult to adjust ; nay, the soul's health has more chances against it, since it depends in the first instance on the health of the body. Yet there are very few persons who are as thoughtful for their soul and its organs, as for their teeth, hair, eyes, lungs, or digestion ; and most of us move recklessly among contagions, and submit to strains in the spiritual order, such as few of us would expose ourselves to in the bodily. Meanwhile the spiritual reacts on the bodily and the bodily on the spiritual. Our thoughts and feelings are vitiated by the imperfection of our bodily functions ; but this imperfection of our bodily functions is nine times out of ten the result of some spiritual imperfection, some lack of forethought, self-control, or comprehension in ourselves or our parents. Thus, even with regard to material well-being, there is no fact more important than that of our constant danger of intellectual and moral deterioration.

### III

It is the chief merit of Nordau's book that his facts and analyses are likely to bring home this danger to the reader, to suggest very shrewd personal suspicions and comparisons to everybody. And it is the chief

fault of Nordau's book (for who cares for his literary and artistic criticisms?) that his mania for limiting degeneracy to the second half of the nineteenth century and to the writers, artists and non-scientific thinkers thereof, confines the causes of degeneracy to merely physiological disturbances, and diverts the attention from what I should call sociological causes of deterioration, namely, the undue pressure on the individual of social habits, routines, and institutions. Such sociological straining and warping of the soul has, of course, always existed, and presumably more in the barbarous Past than in the only semibarbarous Present. Now, as Professor Nordau wishes to persuade us that the spiritual degeneracy of our age is unique and unprecedented, he has not only to close his eyes to all the unwholesomeness which previous centuries displayed in their literature, or hid or half-hid in their religious and social habits; but also to refuse to discuss any causes of unwholesomeness which other centuries have evidently shared with our own. Since, however, we have fortunately no theory to blind us, we may leave Professor Nordau to expatiate on the detrimental effects on nineteenth-century nerves of railways and newspapers, telegraphs and telephones, large towns and colossal discoveries, rapid amassing of fortunes and rapid altering of beliefs; and let us look at a few of the totally different sort of causes which must always have tended, apart from all physiological degeneracy, to deteriorate a certain proportion of individual souls.

The individual soul, perhaps owing to its dependence on the individual body, is rarely congenitally sound

in every part ; and, even where no rudimentary morbidness can be detected, it is never gifted with the very highest powers of every description ; so that it is forced, inevitably, to supply its deficiencies from the abundance of other individual souls, from that stored-up abundance of all times and countries which we call civilisation. Apart from this common fund, accumulated by the united efforts of all men, by the special efforts of special men, and by the almost mechanical action of the great principle of "Compound for sins you have a mind to by damning those you're not inclined to"—apart from civilisation, there is not much logic, patience, self-restraint, gentleness or purity in the isolated individual ; certainly not enough to make him endurable, let alone useful. Separate the individual, even the individual having no spiritual taint analogous to consumption or gout, isolate him from the social surroundings, the principles and prejudices, the fortunate compromises due to the rivalry of so much barbarism and wrongheadedness, set him opposite something quite new, or something about which he may talk or act quite freely ; and note the brute's acts and words ! Nay, note the man when he has a class or nation to back him ; and listen, for instance, to the logic, the humane speech of the individual considered as Conservative, or Socialist, or Protestant, or Catholic, or Atheist ! *Egotism, megalomania* ? Why they are kept down in the normal individual only by the tendency to egotism and megalomania of his neighbours ; if small children are egotists and megalomaniacs, it is because they have been protected, so far, from other children. For the

rest, egotism and megalomania are perpetually bursting out on all sides. Listen to the ordinary, intelligent, educated man, to the superior professional man even, when off his profession. Is not his cocksureness about things outside his own walk, his contempt of arts and modes of life unlike his own, his interest in *his* house, *his* wine, *his* horse, *his* business, very nearly maniacal? Listen, on the other hand, to nations (for nations are unrestrained by shame before each other, and consider such restraint as mean-spirited) are they not maniacs? and is not the respective *national pride* of the Englishman, Frenchman, German, Italian, the purest megalomania in guise of patriotism? Is not every nation, in its hopes and claims, its boasting and blustering, no better than King Picrochole awaiting the Coming of the Coq-cigrués?

If, then, classes, professions, nationalities, lose their attributes of logic, justice, and gentleness, nay, of crassest good sense, whenever they are isolated from other professions, classes, nationalities, or set up in mere hostility opposite to them, how much more will not be lost by the poor individual, when, by some new or faulty adjustment, he is isolated from his fellow individuals, set up as their enemy or their leader? These things may be largely inevitable, but they are atrociously sad, and we may well stop to consider some instances thereof. Has neither Lombroso nor Nordau, glibly analysing the degeneracy of men of talent, ever considered what men *not* of talent would become if subjected to years of neglect, injustice, outrage, and then, perhaps, to years of most fulsome adulation? For, after all, that is what it comes to:

a process, not deliberate certainly, and for the time being quite inevitable, by which mankind calls forth all the worst qualities in those who are its benefactors, fosters their arrogance, injustice, violence, and folly; turns them into fanatics (I had first written lunatics) who tear and trample everything, and help the world in the making of fresh fanatics. Who is most responsible for Wagner's pamphlets, for Zola's *Mes Haines*, for all that most degenerate literature, the literature of blind self-assertion? Nay, is not the most marvellous production since Renaissance humanistic warfare, Whistler's *Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, due to the astonishing criticisms of another man of genius, of Ruskin, himself the victim of the absurd attacks on Turner and pre-Raphaelitism? Alas, of the energies which we poor human beings can so little afford to spare, how much do we not, by the fatality of stupidity and injustice, waste in the detestable self-assertion and self-defence of genius, in the production of more injustice and exaggeration, itself fruitful of exaggeration and injustice!

But wrong adjustment between the individual and the mass, need not attain the pitch of actual ill-treatment, in order to produce very decided deterioration, what Nordau sees as degeneracy, of soul. All mental productivity, like all material, tends to encumber us with obsolete plant and rubbish. There is no system, no routine, no facilitation to learning or doing any particular thing, which does not become more or less of a nuisance, a mechanism for the spoiling of something. All trades, professions, administrations—nay, schools of thought—show it us daily: a man

loses much of his elasticity of mind by such means, although that loss is more than compensated, most often, by the storage of results and the saving of time. But a man, as Emerson says, is himself a method ; every individual must pay for the advantage of being one. And this becomes the case more and more markedly as the man's method is more complex, more special, more different from the method of other men. As a mere question of time and opportunity, every special study tends to exclude external influence and correction, to diminish the healthy reaction and re-adjustment of all things, that is to say, to make the specialist unconscious of the fine proportion between the world and his work, his fellow-men and himself. Nay, all self-expression creates a facility which easily turns to exaggeration, absurdity, self-caricature. Men cannot perceive all facts and think all thoughts at once ; developing their own ideas, those ideas cease to be duly controlled by the thousand million other ideas in the universe ; one explanation covers everything, one fact answers all questions, one kind of physic cures all ills ; and we get very near the region of fads and *idées fixes*. This tendency is very much increased by the result of another insufficiency of human nature : mankind is extremely limited, as yet, not merely in its power of doing, and thinking, but in its power of sympathising. The desire for prominence, for recognition, very often unjustly refused, pits men against each other, while the inability or unwillingness to share material or social advantages forces every member of the same profession into rivalry with the other : hence a tendency, which pure



devotion to truth or beauty can overcome only very slowly, a tendency to regard one's own contribution to science or art, as supplanting those of one's predecessors or neighbours ; and a consequent loss of the faculty of comparing facts and theories, of selecting and correcting, of judging attainment impersonally and equitably ; a very notable diminution in the efficiency of the individual soul.

This phenomenon becomes most obvious when it is accentuated by that neglect or persecution of which I have spoken as producing and reproducing such a fine crop of apparent monomaniacs. The consciousness of exceptional talents, especially when those talents are unnoticed or disputed by others, carries combative natures out of the domain of good sense and decorum, the almost automatic good sense and decorum of those who are comfortable ; and a man of parts requires to be an unusually good keeper of himself, since he soon ceases to be the ward of the majority. The sense of being able to do what most others cannot, needs to be corrected by an appreciation of what has to be done and can be done only by others, such as is very rare as yet in our half-grown humanity ; and when there is no such corrective, the *ego* becomes isolated in his own eyes, and assumes to himself an importance utterly out of proportion to the reality. Hence suspicion, irreverence, animosity towards others ; and that refusal to unite one's thoughts with the thoughts of other men, that refusal of what might be called (most literally and worthily) the *marriage of true minds*, which dooms so much of the world's best talent to sterility.

## IV

• Sterility ; or at least production of rubbish, of something which is not intellectually vital. For we do not sufficiently realise how small a share of our spider's web of thought, embracing and subdividing the universe, is either really spun by ourselves or spun out of the stuff secreted by our own mind ; how much the thought of the individual requires to be helped out by a common thought, or to draw from a common fund the sound material for its web. Hence in all cases where certain kinds of thinking have been sporadic, the thinkers of the particular kind must be thrown quite excessively on their own resources, and must quickly exhaust them. They will become imperfect because isolated thinkers ; and their very imperfection will increase their isolation, by depriving them of an internal standard of soundness of thought which might replace the external one. We notice this in the middle ages : while the artists, theologians, and jurists, the men whose activity is incorporated with that of others, keep their heads very securely on their shoulders, and their notions in sane reference to existing knowledge, we find outside these intellectual guilds, as soon as we get to the sporadic thinkers who deal with natural science or high philosophy, the eccentricity and pretentiousness of quackery. These isolated thinkers—Joachim of Flora, Raymond Lulle, Cardan, Paracelsus, are made giddy by their own height above others, by the void they feel around them : they get to think themselves paragons, possessors of universal

knowledge and power, prophets and sole spiritual legislators. And in the neglected fields of thought which correspond to what natural science and non-theological philosophy were in the middle ages, we, too, have our sporadic thinkers, half seers and half nostrum vendors, Carlyle, Tolstoi, Nietzsche, and others; men whose splendid achievements are due to their own genius, while their blunders and exaggerations are largely caused by the stupidity of their neighbours.

It is the same with moral standards as with intellectual ones; here again it is unnecessary to postulate physiological degeneracy as an explanation of mischievous theory and theoretically based action, new fangled or revived from former days. Every society undoubtedly contains a proportion of individuals who are morally less developed than the average, particularly than the average ought to be, and in whom the imperfection takes the form of indifference or rebellion towards the rules of conduct received by the majority. But is there not likewise another contingent of morally inferior persons whose inferiority, being of the sluggish, passive, as distinguished from the impulsive, kind, manifests itself on the contrary in servile acquiescence to the decisions of the majority, in automatic mimicry of the majority's proceedings? And is the one class, which rebels against what may be good in our moral and social institutions, really more mischievous than the other, which clings heavily to what may be bad? For, after all, moral precepts, and particularly the habitual, practical, unspoken adaptations thereof, represent the worse

as well as the better portion of our very mixed mankind. And there are several kinds of outlaws ; those who are too bad completely to imitate their neighbours, those who are too good, and those, again, I am tempted to think, who are comparatively free either to conform or not to conform, not from any superiority or inferiority, but from lack of imitativeness, lack of sense of congruity, partial independence of position, or absorbing interest in other matters : a class of apparent sceptics or indifferents, which keeps the others from excess, which often holds the casting vote ; and to which most individuals, superior or inferior in their main characteristics, may belong by some isolated habit or notion. These three classes of nonconformity may be easily distinguished wherever men and women gather together for the promulgation of schemes of life, modes of thought, and forms of art which the majority dislikes or despises, from the Théâtre Libre to the Society for Psychical Research, and from the revivals of ritualists or evangelists to the meetings of socialists or anarchists. Looked at from the merely intellectual point of view, the meeting of these three classes, associated merely by the fact of elimination from a larger class, explains why eccentricity, faddism, even positive monomania, always forms a fringe to every centre of new and independent thought ; even as the fact of individual isolation has explained, I think, the fringe of mysticism and fanaticism which surrounds the soundest thought of very solitary individual thinkers. As regards moral atmosphere and even practical habits, this inevitable herding together of outlawed persons, as of outlawed thoughts,

whatever the reason of this outlawry, explains the chief dangers of all revolutionary movements, as it explains the main degradations of highly independent characters. In any sort of revolution the highest and the lowest are always thrust together ; the purest patriot and reformer is apt to find himself the associate of fanatics and criminals, rick burners and bomb throwers, for the mere reason that the powers that be, finding all disturbance equally distressing, have set their face against subversive ideas, as well as against deeds of violence. Nay, the community of persecution almost infallibly warps the judgment of even the noblest thinker ; the awful strain of opposition, the lamentable dreariness of isolation, make him come in contact with, even lean against, the men and things he resembles least, because he is cut off from the men and things that he resembles most. And as with men, so with thoughts. The rational contempt for creeds and regulations which are foolish and harmful, drags with it, in most cases, the irrational contempt for creeds and regulations which are wise and useful ; we know, all of us who have had free-thinking or revolutionary grandfathers and grandmothers, that the waywardness and lawlessness of notion of a man like Shelley need not have been the result of any biological peculiarity ; and that, if they were to any extent deteriorations, they were not necessarily what Nordau calls stigmata of degeneracy. Indeed, we need only search our own souls for the queer comradeship of outlawed thought. And are we not made more lenient towards the vapourings of neo-mystics, the egotism and depravity of decadents,

the uncleanness of realists, by knowing that Professor Nordau would like, if he could, to set up a Holy Office and an Index Expurgatorius, and to commit to the flames the books, to the *maison de santé* the bodies, of all the writers whom, in the name of an immutable and officially consecrated psychological science, he has condemned as degenerate?

V

But the great undefinable thing which we call civilisation progresses despite all friction, makes improvement daily greater despite drawbacks, diminishes year by year the proportion of evil involved in its good. Spiritual degeneracy, deterioration of the man and of his thought, is still going on lustily all round, like the physical degeneracy of which it is sometimes the result, and sometimes the cause. National and class separation, professional routine and limitation, social rivalry, isolation of the exceptional individual and consequent self-assertion; herding together of various kinds of nonconformity and consequent pollution of the superior eccentric by the inferior; all these maladjustments—these lesser of two evils which are yet evils in themselves—are filling the world with damaged thought and feeling which beget in their turn feeling and thought more damaged still. Despite all this, the maladjustments are diminishing, the inevitable evils growing less evil. And in one thing particularly, perhaps because our commercial society weighs lightly on mere opinion, perhaps also (let us hope) because our growing good

sense recognises good sense wherever it finds it—in one thing may we watch a constant diminution of intellectual damage : there is less of the particular kind of friction called intolerance.

Cocksurenness, infallibility, readiness to defend the universe from our private adversaries, is ceasing to be identified with honesty, sincerity, magnanimity ; it is beginning to skulk and mask itself in garments of tolerance and reasonable scepticism. The ardour of reformation is at length, thank Heaven, beginning to turn a little upon ourselves, our ideas and associates ; or to restrain at least its readiness to clear the world of other people's faults and errors. That things are really moving in this direction is proved, I think, by our general astonishment at Professor Nordau's book. His absolute self-confidence, his unsuspecting readiness to apply his own standards and judge all men and things on his own responsibility, his prophetic violence of vituperation and fury of destruction, his outspoken willingness to undertake the saving of society ; all these are things which would scarcely have surprised us in the not very far-off days when Ruskin was writing *Modern Painters* and Karl Marx *On Capital* ; they were the accompaniment of the highest philosophic discrimination a century ago, as we can verify by re-reading our Voltaire, Rousseau, or Diderot. But now, thank Heaven again, they surprise us beyond measure in a populariser of scientific notions, and even lead to the suspicion that Professor Nordau may belong to his own vast tribe of degenerates. I do not think, therefore, that unless the world become socialistically organised, and the care of men's souls become once

more a matter of state-jobbery, I do not think we need be really alarmed at the prospect of a committee of spiritual public safety, examining all literature, and art and philosophy, and, by an efficient organisation of lay-confraternities, lay-inquisitions, and lay-excommunications, sweeping off the face of the earth all heretics guilty of offending the ways of Nature or Nordau. People will remember that improvement, as well as deterioration, is often found disagreeable and dangerous; they will reflect that Nature herself is the greatest of all innovators; they may even be morbid enough (in Nordau's opinion) to think with profit on the symbol of the Son of God crucified between thieves, while the High Priest and Pilate sit at meat with the very best people. So we need waste no more words against the proposed new Inquisition.

But Professor Nordau's book, as I have tried to suggest throughout these criticisms, should furnish us nevertheless with food for exceedingly salutary and needful thought; and this as much through its shortcomings as its merits, its practical absurdities as its scientific wisdom.

We are all of us liable to becoming if not *degenerate*, then at least undesirable: faulty, poor of stuff, and scant of measure in the very things we most insist upon; and we all require, in our families, friends, neighbours, but first and foremost in ourselves, to keep a sharp look-out, to fight against these faultinesses and shortcomings. It is difficult to guess whether, in freeing ourselves from the many enervations of the confessional, we have or have not lost something which made, in other ways, for spiritual health. At any rate



no one can deny that indifference to the soul's hygiene is one of the drawbacks of our present accidental, *helter-skelter, unintelligent form of individualism*. No one goes nowadays to the doctor for a spiritual diagnosis, and perhaps it is better there should be no such doctor to go to ; but no one even asks his friend metaphorically to feel his pulse or look at his tongue, or has a friend to whom either pulse or tongue, in the spiritual order, could reveal anything ; nobody knows anything about the symptoms of his soul's health or disease, or supposes anything to be of the nature of such symptoms. Hence most of us—all of us who have received no strong religious bias—prepare to go through life on the supposition that we are sound because we are *we* ; what we feel in ourselves we take to be normal ; our preferences and aversions seem the only possible ones under the circumstances, simply and merely because we know of no others and institute no comparisons. Meanwhile—and here comes in the great utility of books like Nordau's, including a large proportion of Nordau's own book—it is just as likely as not that we may be developing, in our innermost self, tendencies and habits destructive, if not to others directly, then indirectly through the impairing of our own physical and spiritual efficiency ; we may be allowing ourselves to become, through the pressure of external circumstances, semi-maniacs and semi-criminals, where we might, had we known, have remained sane and harmless. Nay, the general opinion on this subject, so far as there is any, tends to consider it safest that we should go on blindly among dangers of this sort, and avoid madness by not knowing which

way madness lies. It is of course possible that the knowledge of danger may create panic ; that the reading of books like Nordau's may lead to egotistic self-analysis, scared self-diagnosis, and in a measure, perhaps, self-suggestion of avoidable peculiarities. But, after all, how many of us have not already suffered in ignorance, tortured and damaged ourselves, as Renan did in his childhood with the notion of simony, and Bunyan with the possibility of sin against the Holy Ghost ; merely to return, because of our ignorance, to the same bad ways we have been torturing ourselves about. Surely it is not merely more safe, but in the long run more comfortable, for the spiritual valetudinarian to know once for all what he had better do and better avoid, what forms of infection he is likely to catch, what kinds of strain he is least able to endure, what rules of exercise and diet he must observe ; what, in the domain of the soul, are, to all men or to him individually, tonics or poisons.

All these possibilities and probabilities are most usefully brought before us in Professor Nordau's analyses of degeneracy in general, and even in those criticisms of living authors which, however far-fetched and unjust in their particular application, are nevertheless correct as accounts of the more subtle and latent forms of spiritual disease. On the other hand, Professor Nordau, if we analyse his most glaring faults, is a good warning of what we might all come to if we did not resist the deteriorating effects of social mechanisms, the tendency to produce apparent degeneracy inherent in most of our social difficulties and discomforts, and in many of our facilitations and

advantages. For Professor Nordau is the type of the specialist, highly valuable in his own speciality, but acquiring in its exercise a faith in his own infallibility, a blindness to all qualities save those treated by his own study or required for its prosecution, which allow him to approach all other fields without perception of their requirements and his incompetence; the very adaptation of thought to his own line preventing his understanding the different thought of others. While, to make the typical warning complete, his own rashness and injustice rousing against him all the thoughtless, unscrupulous combativeness of others, surrounds him with what appears a world of imbecility and wickedness, against which he feels justified in venting all his own least intelligent brutality. Until, to those who can resist the contagion of absurdity and injustice, Nordau becomes, as I have said, a typical warning, filling one with a holy terror ("Alios age incitatos alios age rabidos") of being run away with by any idea however excellent, of letting one's self be fuddled or made uproarious by the very best intellectual wine.

One word more. The reader will lay down Nordau's volume, and perhaps my criticism thereof, with a vague notion that whatever may be the truth about degeneracy, the Philistine (and we are all Philistines in most of our capacities) is safe, neither dangerous nor in danger. Now this, in the name and in the face of all the Philistines of Creation, is what I desire to protest against. In the first place, as I have just remarked, every man and woman is in some things a Philistine, born of Philistines and brought up in the air of Philistia. In the second place, the Philistine, taken as an indivi-

dual, is far from necessarily wholesome or social, as distinguished from anti-social and morbid. His ungenial defects (taking genial in the psychologist's sense as well as the other) are none the less dangerous because they are shared by ten thousand others more or less like himself; nor are his anti-social ways, his habits of vanity, lust, rapacity, and sloth less detrimental because they are confined within the limits of laws and customs which he himself has made or levelled up to. He is not a degenerate, very likely; but he is an imperfect being, and every one pays for his imperfections. Are religious bigotry, social snobbishness, official corruption, industrial grabbingness, tolerated vice, parental and conjugal tyranny, due to exceptional degenerate individuals or to the normal mass? What if the standard, the *norm* is low? Nay, are not degenerates themselves due to the normals' wretched inefficiency? Does not the selfishness and shortsightedness of the normal mass foster every form of cussedness, exaggeration, fanaticism, that is to say, wrong individual attitude, either by its assistance or the opposition? Inquire into cases of infraction of social laws: have those who infringe them been dealt with wisely? are the laws they break (however foolishly and selfishly) unselfish, allwise laws, particularly framed in view to their happiness? In a word, does society not produce its own degenerates and criminals, even as the body produces its own diseases, or at least fosters them?

This is no anti-social tirade; neither anarchy nor egotism is my special form of degeneracy. The individual, it seems to me, becomes weak and limited

in proportion as he is isolated and self-centred. But we must not count too much upon the soundness of the majority, nor imagine that it is necessarily more complete than the individual. All class prejudice, half of what we call national feeling, is merely accumulated and inveterate spiritual degeneracy ; and so far from the majority being able, in such matters, to protect the individual, it is only the individual, the eccentric, nonconforming, rebellious individual, who can, in the long run, save the majority. We are always, and always have been (*pace* Professor Nordau), surrounded by causes of degeneracy, and perhaps the one we need most guard against nowadays is the notion that society can relieve the individual from his spiritual difficulties and defend him from his spiritual dangers. Most dangers are not the same to all individuals, but bigotry and fanaticism are dangers to every individual ; and to the community, they are greater dangers than morbid peculiarities of a less spreading kind. The worst kind of spiritual degeneracy is surely that which is gregarious, and which, for that reason, is unsuspecting of its own existence. To combat it we require to hear every one, to allow every variety of human being to express itself ; we require to compare opinion with opinion, to correct bias by bias, to level exaggeration by exaggeration, to taste of all that we may select in everything. For the rule of life is selection ; not merely of us by nature and fate, but by us of fate and nature. Our souls are beset by dangerous tendencies, notions, and examples : let every individual, therefore, scrutinise and select among the tendencies and notions of others ; scrutinise and select more carefully still among the

tendencies and notions he may find in himself. Against degeneracy of soul there is, after all, but one sweeping remedy : the determination to alter continually for the better ; the determination to become, rather than to remain, absolutely sane.



# **TOLSTOI AS PROPHET**

**NOTES ON THE PSYCHOLOGY OF ASCETICISM**





## TOLSTOI AS PROPHET

### NOTES ON THE PSYCHOLOGY OF ASCETICISM

IN his religious and philosophical writings, Count Tolstoi would seem to represent the prophetic temperament in such incarnation as is likely to become the commonest, indeed perhaps the only possible, one in the near future. For, in the gradual disruption of dogmatic creeds, the man born to the prophetic quality and function tends more and more to be a heretic and an anarchist; to practise an exegesis backed by no authority; and to benefit or harass mankind, to exhibit to mankind the spectacle of prophecy, more and more obviously without any inspiration save the unquestioned one of his own individual constitution. The Prophet, being a type of humanity, represents certain impulses for good and evil existing in numbers of his fellow-creatures, is in fact a specimen of a human force of the universe; and he not only displays in crudest isolation special tendencies making for life's greater fruitfulness or sterility, but also directs the scathing light of almost monomaniacal perception on matters which the average routine of existence neglects to our disadvantage. The Prophet is useful as a teacher; but still more useful

as a lesson. It is in this double capacity that the following marginal notes may help to put to use the prophet, not the artist, Tolstoi.

## I

“To the man perverted by the false doctrines of the century, it seems,” &c., &c.

This form of words, perpetually recurring throughout Tolstoi's didactic writings, acquaints us with one of the chief drawbacks of the prophetic mind: an incapacity so utter of conceiving any views different from his own, that they appear monstrous not merely in their results but also in their origin. “Perverse,” “False,” a kind of devil's spawn *in vacuo*. Now, the wonderful tenacity of *false* doctrines and *perverse* attitudes would suggest, to such as are not prophets, that there may be something to be said in their favour; that such *falseness* and *perverseness* may be an inevitable—nay, a necessary—stage of something else; that it is, in some fashion, in league with the ways of things. The theologians of the past could postulate Original Sin or the Fundamental Abominableness of Matter; but one might expect that the prophets of our own day, Stirner and Nietzsche, quite as much as Tolstoi, would have forfeited this logical advantage and desisted from judging all things as if they had been intended to please just them. Not a bit; the prophetic temperament has remained unchanged; and all prophets—prophets of cynicism, quite as much as prophets of asceticism—display the same alacrity in seating them-

selves down *ad dexteram Domini*, or, indeed, on the throne off which the Lord has been hustled as some sort of idol. What unhesitating rapidity they display, those great nostrum-mongers, not merely in defining the world's contents and making plans for its complete overhauling, but in packing off everything which does not suit them to the bottomless pit ! Mankind, in the mean while, like some half-hearted follower of Savonarola, shoves the *false* and *perverse* doctrines not into the destroying flames, but merely into the dust-heap, whence they are incontinently extracted, for exclusive use, by another Prophet or another School of Prophecy. Let no one take these remarks for the raillery of scepticism : the thorough-paced sceptic of modern days (my ingenious friend H. B. Brewster, for instance) is just as much carried away by the spirit of prophecy as the dogmatists whom he scoffs at. I am speaking as a mere looker-on, vaguely conscious that, since they all exist, these various excessive views must each answer to some aspect of reality ; vaguely regretting, also, that we, less specially gifted creatures, should waste so much of the scant time given us for the application of truth in sorting the litter of exaggerations and the rubbish of anathema with which the great One-sided Ones encumber the earth.

The heap of valuable and worthless things constituted by Tolstoi's philosophical and moral writings is the better worth our sorting that, in trying to understand this latest addition to the literature of prophetic asceticism, we shall be learning to understand, perhaps to select and profit by, some other ascetic doctrines, of so ancient an origin and such habitual repetition that

we have almost ceased to look either for their psychological reason or for their practical application.

## II

"Like the penitent thief, I knew that I was unhappy. that I suffered, and that *all the human beings around me were suffering and feeling themselves unhappy . . .* and, even as the penitent thief (nailed to his cross) saw coming towards him the horrid darkness of death . . . so I saw the same prospect open before me."

The words I have italicised contain the main postulate of all pessimism, and of nearly all asceticism religious as well as philosophical, Buddhist and Stoical of Schopenhauer as much as of the "Imitation." The pessimist is unhappy : therefore every one else is ; he sees no meaning in life save that of his ascetic formula : therefore there is none ; he is afraid of death : therefore fear of death is in every breast. And this gratuitous classification of all mankind under one's own headings is justified by the additional generalisation, that those who imagine themselves to feel or think differently are perverted by false doctrine or sunk in beastlike indifference.

## III

After this follows logically the second postulate of such as think, or rather of such as are constituted, like Tolstoi :

"Why had I not earlier put in practice this doctrine

which gives me happiness? *The answer is very simple: Because I did not know the truth.*"

At first sight, it seems strange that the creator of such marvellously living beings as Natacha, Peter Besukoff, Princess Mary, Anna Karenine, Oblonsky or Levine should not have been able to think, what he so clearly felt and showed in them, that human beings do not *seek happiness* but obey instincts, and that the greatest mass of probable happiness in front has little attractive power save when it coincides with the *vis a tergo*, the forward push of cravings, tendencies and habits. One might imagine that in Tolstoi the novelist's conception was so concrete and individual, the novelist's genius so automatic and unreasoning, as to reduce the powers of analysis and generalisation to almost childish insignificance. Be this as it may, this greatest painter of human character, able to copy with faultless precision the soul's actual workings, seems not to know the rudiments of the soul's physiology or mechanics, on which those workings depend. It never seems to enter his head that, if this "knowledge," this paramount doctrine of such direct application and infallible virtue, has remained hidden, obscured, for near nineteen hundred years, there must have been, in mankind, but a very faint need for a remedy so near at hand; nor that this inefficacy in so long a past argues but small immediate result in the present; those self-same interests which hid or distorted this doctrine of salvation showing, by their tenacity, that it is absurd to expect them to yield and disappear of a sudden and as by miracle. But the fact is that Tolstoi, much as he would disclaim it, not only admits of miracle, but

bases all his hope upon it. His own experience is of a miraculous kind, simply because, to his own powers of observation, the thing which really happened, the way it happened, is necessarily hidden. Tolstoi's conversion is one of those of which all religious autobiography is full, and of which Professor William James has put together so fine a volume of specimens. At a given moment in a man's life, either after a period of religious stress or with apparent total suddenness, *something takes place in the soul*: the doubts, scruples, fears, despair, vanish; and in their place is a new set of hopes, a new vital certainty, or (as the doctor in Ibsen's play would call it) a new "Vital Lie." What is it that actually happened? The souls liable to such complete change and renovation, sudden or gradual, are those least likely to be able to tell us. For the concentration of one kind of feeling, the unfamiliarity of the elements formerly latent and now dominant, the very completeness of former despair and present joy, make him who experiences such a conversion incapable of observing, and perhaps of conceiving, its real nature.

The conversion of Tolstoi is not a sudden one; but it is characterised by the *mono-ideism* of such phenomena. The intensity and exclusiveness of his long and suicidal broodings did not leave in his soul that lucid, disinterested half which can understand and intelligently record: there was but one self at work, one self floundering in nightmare and suddenly lifted to beatific relief. Tolstoi fails to notice what strikes every spectator from the first—namely, that in his least regenerate days, his most carnal and perversely

thinking days, he dealt preferably with characters unknown to previous novelists, Peter, André, Levine, men haunted already by the very thought which was to overshadow his own mind, the eternal query : " Why live, since one must die ? " That such should have been his heroes shows that he knew more of asceticism than other novelists perhaps capable of creating his other characters—say, Wronsky or Nicholas Rostoff. This, evidently, never strikes Tolstoi himself. Still less, of course, does it occur to him that the importance taken in his mind by that recurring " Why ? " let alone the fact of its having, in the midst of prosperity, driven him to the verge of suicide, shows that he was constitutionally destined to concentrate on this problem ; or, briefly, that the value of his conversion depended on his passionate need of it : the remedy was commensurate with the evil, and both were in himself, inborn.

This Tolstoi could not see. And, failing to guess that his was a very special and rare case, he attributed his own spiritual drama to the rest of mankind. A large number of his neighbours were visibly discontented and unhappy ; a larger still he chose to consider as being so : well, then, their discontent and their unhappiness were due to the same causes as his own. They might, indeed, explain it by poverty, illness, cramped activities, thwarted passions, by anything or everything they chose ; that, Tolstoi assured them, was but delusion, and the real matter with them was what had been the matter with himself.

For in all prophetic persons there is a sadly comic side, reminding one of those valetudinarians who press



the pills or waters which have relieved their liver or their spleen on all the people of their neighbourhood with damaged heart, brain or marrow—nay, with poor bruised or broken limbs. Moreover, in the spiritual example, the recalcitrance of supposed fellow-sufferers, their clinging to their own diagnosis, especially their making light of their own ills, is instantly set down as a sure sign that all sensation and all judgment have been perverted by the very malady they refuse to own up to. But, worst off of any, those who, in the face of the universal, infallible and painless panacea, actually maintain that, for the present at least, they have no ailments of any kind, that they are (shameless or deluded wretches!) sound in mind and limb! As to those, well, all Tolstoi can say is that, just in proportion to their contentment with life, they are already dead and done for; galvanised corpses, set on end to gibber and to poison others with their putrescence.

#### IV

Let us continue our analysis of Tolstoi's postulates; which, at the same time, is an examination of the modes of thought characteristic of the ascetic attitude and the prophetic temperament.

"Every human being lives in the name of some particular principle; and this principle, in whose name he lives in that given fashion, is no other thing than his religion."

The identification holds good only when the principle in question happens to be of the sort we all

mean by "religious." If we accepted Tolstoi's statement without this rider, which makes it tautological, we should be obliged, like H. B. Brewster in his "*Ame Païenne*," to identify a man's religion, his God, with his dominant impulse or combination of impulses; and the most profane and wicked lives might thus be led, as Hoffmann imagines the operatic Don Juan's, in the name of the *principle*, let us say, of Leporello's catalogues. The *vital principle* of most men's lives has been given its right name only by Nietzsche; it is "My Inclination." But it is not of such principles as these that Tolstoi is speaking; and any other principle of life, any principle conscious, formulated and dominating all other impulses and habits, any principle which can be called a religion, exists only in a minority of cases, at least in the sense of constant intellectual reference and constant moral incentive.

## V

"Life is an aspiration after happiness; the aspiration after happiness is life."

This is psychologically false. In reality *life is*—that is, exclusively consists of—no more *this* than any other very frequent item of consciousness; life being, to a large extent, absorption in various concerns or interests to the positive exclusion of all "aspiration after happiness." Nor is there any reason why such "aspiration after happiness" should be more frequent; for, in the majority of cases, happiness itself is secured,

and best secured, without any conscious straining after it. Happiness is secured, and with it life's furtherance for the individual and race, in that manner which Tolstoi, unable to deny its existence, condemns beforehand with the absurd epithet of "animal"; secured by the play of clashing or coordinated impulses, which, so far from being more particularly *animal*, may happen to be impulses of the highest moral or æsthetic or constructive or intellectual sort.

All pessimism, all asceticism, is founded upon the supposition of what Tolstoi calls the "illusory thirst for enjoyment." Now, however numerous the cases where enjoyment proves impossible or mischievous, the continued existence of the human race shows that, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, neither the enjoyment nor the thirst for it is illusory, but, on the contrary, a genuine advantage, making subsequent enjoyment not less, but more, possible by perfecting the sensibilities. The healthy activity of the whole individual, with its inevitable hierarchy of impulses, both secures pleasure and forestalls cloying, and, by its inclusion of intellectual and sympathetic interests, its subordination of others to these, it diminishes conflict with fellow-beings quite as effectually as does Tolstoi's Renunciation. And here let me say that there is surely something mean in this reciprocal renunciation, resulting in the cessation of struggle and disappointment. Such renunciation is often needful in our imperfect individual case: our eye gives us offence, and we cast it from us. But such rough-and-ready, such wasteful, destructive methods are surely not admissible in a philosophy of life, in a

*counsel of perfection!* The universal, as distinguished from the individual, rule for greater happiness is not self-diminution but assimilation, expansion, the non-ego becoming, in imagination and feelings, an integral part of the ego. Asceticism preaches voluntary impoverishment: my neighbours cease to steal because I possess nothing; I cease to covet, because they possess nothing; 'tis Epictetus's safety after the thieves had carried away his brass lamp. But the law of human life is baster: asking freely and giving fully; mutual enriching through each other's superfluity. Asceticism refuses to admit this law; for all asceticism moves in the logical circle of pain as cause and effect.

## VI

“Men, like all other living creatures, are forced by the conditions of life to live forever at one another's expense, devouring one another literally or metaphorically. And man, in so far as gifted with reason, cannot blink the fact that every material advantage is obtained by one creature only at the expense of some other creature.”

A series of quite gratuitous biological and economical assumptions, which are made more intelligible by a statement in another place that “the workman who wears out his body and hastens his death is giving that body as food to others.”

Now, in all these premises, Tolstoi omits one half of the fact—namely, that, in the majority of cases, a human being, while *giving himself*, gets, or has got,

something from others. *Taking* by no means implies *stealing*, nor is *benefiting by one's fellows* the same thing as preying on them. The workman is not breaking down his health and hastening his death any faster while working for others than while working for himself, except from occasional reasons quite independent of whom the work is to benefit most. He is not breaking down his health or hastening his own death more than if he were committing excesses of other kinds for his own sole satisfaction ; and, except through the accidental or incidental misarrangement of the world, he is *not breaking down his health or hastening on death at all*, but rather the reverse. The detriment to the individual is due to excess as regards himself, not in the least to profitableness to others. The increase of the world's material and spiritual wealth depends upon activity ; but activity, when not excessive, is an integration, not a disintegration, of individual life. The world is carried on upon the principle of barter and compensation ; and, even in such low forms of life as those where animals or savages actually prey upon each other, the one who feeds upon his victim to-day is bound to be fed upon, as an individual or a class, to-morrow : the lion ends off as the sustenance of vultures, jackals and insects. But Tolstoi, for reasons we shall presently grasp and can already guess at, chooses to consider that all profiting by the existence of others represents an unwilling or a voluntary sacrifice. When it is voluntary, he calls it love ; and here again comes a gratuitous assumption. Let us look at this question of Love and of Sacrifice, for it is important and one upon which ordinary

thought (though luckily not every-day practice !) is in considerable confusion. Alongside of the sentence about the workman destroying himself for the benefit of others, is another example of what Tolstoi chooses to consider as self-sacrifice : the mother suckling her baby. He could not have come by a better refutation of his own theory ; for it is plain that the mother is giving life to her child, but it is also plain that her bodily health and her happiness gain by this supposed sacrifice, which is, in reality, an organic advantage. From such an example, however, Tolstoi concludes that "love is really worthy of that name only when it is the sacrifice of self." In one sense, this is quite undeniable ; but that sense is not Tolstoi's. For *love is preference* ; and love leads to self-sacrifice, that is to say, to sacrifice of greater or smaller advantages—nay, even of health, power or life—simply because all preference of one particular thing or group of things leads to sacrifice of other things or groups of things, whether that preference be socially beneficial (which we call "unselfish") or socially detrimental (which we call "selfish"), whether it happen to be duty, ambition, hatred, vanity, lust ; whether it be the love of Cordelia or the love of Francesca ; though, of course, the measure of every preference (since preference implies alternative) is not the measure more especially of love, and still less is it love's chief characteristic. The characteristic, the typical, fact of love must be sought for in that from which the highest love has, by analogy, borrowed its name, and perhaps, very literally, taken its origin : the union of two creatures who take joy in producing a third. The

analogous process takes place in the spiritual domain : we give our thought, our fancy, our will, in union with the external world or with the will, the thought or fancy of others ; and in so doing create new forms, new ideas, new modes of feeling, nay, new selves.

But at the bottom of the Tolstoian conception of love (which is only the usual ascetic one) is the old, savage notion of sacrifice : of a universe so evil that all happiness must be discounted in misery—"I did but taste a little honey with the end of the rod that was in mine hand, and, lo, I must die!" The implacable gods, the atrocious Cosmos, the Ogre Fee-Faw-Fum at the top of every Bean Stalk, insist on increasing suffering through every apparent alleviation or apparent enjoyment. It is worth while, especially in the face of a thinker like Tolstoi, to disentangle the notion of *giving* from the notion of *giving up* ; to separate the notion of renunciation, as a choice between two positive or negative *desiderata*, from the notion of renunciation, as mere refusal of good and acceptance of evil. The really fruitful act of giving oneself, one's strength, attention, thought or feeling, is not a loss, but the fulfilling of an organic need as essential as that of material or spiritual assimilation ; it is, in fact, the inevitable sequel of real assimilation. If the sacrifice of something is often implied in this, it is merely the sacrifice by alternative, the preference of one need or desire or pleasure over another. Such preference as this is a principle of order in the moral realm : the fulness of life means, *ipso facto*, the constant checking of the less important by the more important ; it means

moderation because it means alternative, selection, subordination and hierarchy of the impulses in which life consists. The vanity of the pursuit of pleasure, of which Tolstoi, like every moralist, makes (and rightly, perhaps) so much capital, results from the absence of such a complex hierarchy of impulse : the larger part of the pleasure-seeker is sacrificed to a momentary desire, and that omitted bulk of his nature either upsets the satisfaction aimed at, or leaves the unruly desire to languish in isolation.

But Tolstoi, like all ascetics, seeks his remedy not in moderation,, not in the development of other impulses, not in fact in the enriching of the individual life, but in its impoverishment. *Moral Good* is, according to him, that condition where man pursues nothing, for its own sake or his own ends, and nothing for the interest and pleasure of the pursuit ; but only for the sake of another human being, or of a vague sense of duty personified as God. Tolstoi's ideal of life is, like his notion of love, an ideal of diminution, of sacrifice ; and it seems likely that, even as in the ritual of primeval man, the ascetic conception of sacrifice as such, of sacrifice as loss, impoverishment, mutilation, is very closely connected with the fear of death ; sacrifice being, however inexplicitly, a commutation, a partial, symbolical or vicarious death, instead of a total and positive one.

## VII

In the case of Tolstoi, there is the repeated and unqualified expression of the constant thought, the



constant fear, of Death. Already, in his pseudo-autobiography, we find the following funeral oration on the old housekeeper Natalia Savichna :

“She accomplished the best and greatest act of the life of this world : dying without regret and without fear.”

Now, this fear, whose absence thus seems a rare form of holiness, is, in a sense, a misconception, a misconception revealing the fundamental complexion of all asceticism. Let us examine it. *Life and Death* form together one of those false antitheses which have been pointed out by that subtle analyst, Gabriel Tarde. Life and Death are opposed in position ; but not, so to speak, in the ground which they cover or the facts they respectively include. Because *what is alive* cannot also *be dead*, and *what is dead* cannot also be *alive*, we have, in our slovenly fashion, grown accustomed to think of the fact of being alive and the fact of being dead as of equal importance, intensity and extension. We overlook the real antithesis, which is between *death* and *birth*, the *two points without magnitude* between which extends life. Moreover, we have confused *death* with the process of dying, often accompanied by illness or preceded by decay, which is a portion, sometimes a considerable portion, of the processes of life. Nor is this all. The immense part played in our life by the death of others gives the notion of dying a frightful duration in our consciousness, and makes us think, by analogy, that our own death also is a wide blot or oil spot in our life. Hence death, which, being the limit of life, exists in reality outside it, becomes, so far as it is thought

about and feared, a most important and terrible part of life.

Life is consciousness ; and, except in consciousness, death is nothing ; it becomes, in consciousness, grief or terror. But grief and terror are realities. Of course ; since it is thanks to them that death, or rather the notion of death, has come to poison so much of life. Heaven forbid I should argue that either philosophy or religion can ever abolish grief or fear, abolish the agony of departing, the agony of being left behind. Loss is loss, and parting is parting, a fact, a horror, which nothing can efface. But let us not add to these the dread either of life or of death, deeply, indissolubly entangled as they become. And if philosophy represent any higher truth, and religion any higher utility, let them strive to diminish this hideous tangle, to hold our thoughts and feelings asunder ; make us see things as they are, and make them, so far as our attitude toward them goes, a little more what they should be. Life, our own and that of our beloved, is good in proportion as it is safe and complete, as it is untouched by the chance, the fact, but worst of all, the *fear*, of death. And all healthy life tends to cast forth from itself the vain and paralysing thought of its own end.

## VIII

We have seen that the prophetic temper is characterised by a tendency to *mono-ideism*, and that mono-ideism invariably tends to jealousy of all that it

~~mono-ideistic~~ jealousy, is his elaborate catalogue of sinful indulgences; of what, especially, he puts under the rubric "intoxication," including therein, as venial or mortal sin, the intoxication not merely by wine, tobacco or fleshly love, but by art, literature, "gestures and sounds," and even bicycling. The exaggeration is so gross that one fails at first to conceive how it could come about in a mind as originally excellent, and a life as many-sided, as Tolstoi's. But the explanation, furnished by comparison with the raptures of earlier mystics, appears to be that the ascetic has his own form of intoxication. Here is Tolstoi's account of his state of beatitude after his conversion has been consummated :

"All that seems evil to me does so merely because I believe in myself and not in God; and as, from this life where *it is so easy to do His will, since His will is mine*, I can fall nowhere except into Him, what I possess is complete joy and good. *And all I could write would fail to express what I feel.*"

Let us consider these seemingly simple statements. It is so easy for Tolstoi to do God's will! God's will is, after all, only Tolstoi's; Tolstoi can fall only into God! Is this presumptuous certainty of righteousness, this identification of the individual impulse and the moral law, this unmixed and ineffable joy, anything save an intoxication of a more insidious, but scarcely less unwholesome, kind? Taking in the full meaning of such words as these, one wonders whether there will ever arise a new habit of spiritual cleanness, of intellectual chastity, making men question and reject

emotional self-indulgence like this, which sullies the reason and sterilises the will. One doubts it. For, from century to century, mankind may be watched yielding, even as to lower kinds of self-indulgence, to the subtle and high-flown temptation of mysticism. This temptation consists in attributing to an emotional state of our own (the state of Nietzsche's Zarathustra, as much as the state of Kipling's poor old Lama) the name and the importance of a generalised objective fact; nay, of the greatest and most solemn of facts which man has thus generalised: the Will of God, the Nature of Things.

The very recurrence of such a process of spiritual intoxication implies, it may be said, a recurrent need of it. Yes; but a need which results from other needs being neglected. Between the cravings which produce science, art, laws—nay, food and progeny—and the mystical craving such as this of Tolstoi there is a fundamental difference: they are fruitful, and it is barren.

And this word "barren" suggests another of the drawbacks of asceticism. In its exclusiveness, its mono-ideism, its readiness to condemn all save itself, asceticism tends to waste much of the moral resources (so cruelly needed!) of ordinary mortals, and, on the other hand, to get its moral gifts rejected by those who require them most; its teaching is shelved as dead letter, or, at best, counsel of perfection.

Renounce the world, preaches Tolstoi; despise, cease to relish, such of the world's work, of the body's functions, as cannot be relinquished; let nothing touch you for its own sake or your own; eradicate

self from your thoughts and feelings, and replace it by your neighbour, by mankind, by that impersonal personification of ideals which is Tolstoi's notion of *God*.

"If such be saintliness, chivalrousness, sentiment," answers the rest of mankind silently to itself, "by all means keep it on a shelf out of the way of ordinary life. Truthfulness, justice, chastity, mercy, are clearly quite unsuitable to the increase of wealth and the rearing of families; and is it not the saints and prophets, Tolstoi for instance, who tell us so?"

Now, as a matter of fact, to what *save* daily life can ideals, sentiment, saintliness, be profitably applied? Truthfulness, honesty, justice, chastity, mercy, are nothing but correctives of this world's ways; and it is only as such correctives that, *save for* the æsthetic pleasure of a divinity, they can ever be wanted. Unworldliness must be cultivated because our interests are legitimately worldly.

But holiness and heroism, precious because they are useful, have been considered as precious apart from use. Saints and heroes have been cultivated like rare and wonderful flowers, incapable of ever turning into fruit for food and seed. And, as a result of such isolation and sterility, mankind has come to be divided—as we see it in Buddhism, in Christian monasticism and less crassly elsewhere—into the church and the world: those who accept life and sin, and those who kill the body, or all the body stands for, in order to perfect the soul. Like every other ascetic, Tolstoi, in preaching his doctrine of renunciation, is unconsciously giving in to the vicious automatism which

sunders the natural man from the saint, and which discourages all application of higher feelings to ordinary existence on the score that ordinary existence can never be composed of higher feelings only. And in so far Tolstoi merely increases the modern tendency to question the efficacy of all moral teaching, to doubt the wholesomeness of sentiment and to consider ideals of conduct either as a mere symptom, an *epiphenomenon*, a fly on the axletree of progress, or (and human illogicalness reconciles both indictments) as a mischievous interference with the automatic ways of natural selection. It would instead be more philosophical to consider the continued recurrence of such ascetic or idealising tendencies as a proof of their utility, despite all drawbacks, in helping on the practical existence of mankind. But ascetics have treated their especial soul-medicine or soul-food as the one panacea; and mankind (as prone to exaggeration as the prophets themselves) has developed a tendency to consider the dealers in panaceas as quacks or the victims of quacks.

## IX

The foregoing notes have attempted to set forth some of the chief peculiarities of the ascetic view of life, and of the prophetic temperament, as we may study them united in the person of Tolstoi. We have taken stock of the pessimistic basis of asceticism, its rejection of moderation, equilibrium of function, and such moral improvements as rest upon them, in opposition to wholesale renunciation; its passion for

sacrifice and its preoccupation with death ; finally, its tendency to a divorce between spirituality and life. In a similar manner, we have had occasion to verify the isolated and one-sided attitude of the born prophet ; his attribution of his own moods and needs to the rest of the world, and his jealousy of, nay, hostility towards, every other mode of being ; his incapacity for assimilating the ideas of others, for meeting them half-way and, of course, for feeling any correction or check to his own notions ; briefly, his mono-ideism, and his mixture (odd, but so explicable) of complete self-belief and utter scepticism of received opinion.

And, having set these studies so far before the reader, I can forestall his question, and shall endeavour to answer it : as I have had to answer it for myself in the course of my reading of Tolstoi, to account for our instinctive sympathy with the seemingly useless teachings of asceticism.

This usefulness, these uses, result from the same peculiarities as the faults and the drawbacks. Isolation and mono-ideism give the ascetic and the prophet an extraordinary freedom of view, wherever his own definite attitude and limited idea are not concerned. Unconscious of those sympathising and imitative impulses which compact other individuals with their fellows ; untouched by any of the temptations which make others blink and compromise ; inattentive to any other man's views and, therefore, perfectly sceptical towards them ; and harassed, moreover, through and through, by organic dissatisfaction and unrest, this thinker, alone with his own thoughts and

feelings (his Eagle and his Serpent, like Nietzsche's Zarathustra) is the most ruthless of critics and destroyers. Every ascetic is, in essence, an anarchist and a nihilist, a "sayer of 'No'" to the accepted life of the world—in the words (more significant than he, perhaps, knew) of James Hinton, a "Law Breaker"; since the only law he believes in is the law of his own exceptional and isolated way of being. Hence he sees, as no laughing sceptic ever can, through every exaggeration, every "vital lie" save his own. The dominant and recurrent thought of all ascetics, from Buddhism and Ecclesiastes, through Stoicism and Christian Mysticism to the smallest modern revivalist, is *vanity*—the emptiness, non-existence, of everything save their own narrow wishes, needs and habits. Now, this attitude of mind corresponds to a great deal that really exists: in the happy-go-lucky, lazy, yet hurried, processes of life, there is quite an enormous amount which is dead letter, perfunctory, wasteful and mischievous; results of imperfect evolution, like those useless organs, those imperfect adaptations, which, according to the ingenious paradox of Dr. Metchnikoff, account for all disease, all vice and suffering, but which an instinct of social safety or individual laziness goes on admiring, as the Bridgewater writers admired the "harmonious designs of Nature." On to all such perfunctory, dead letter, all such lying things, all such imperfect adaptations and mischievous survivals, the ascetic, the prophet, the marvellous anarchist, Tolstoi, directs his ruthless clear-sightedness. We all know his chapters on luxury, on the pseudo-work of the so-called intellectual classes, on the pseudo-



morality of official religion, on so many of the idle activities which give us our daily bread or our daily ration of self-satisfaction. His immense and wearisome volume on art remains as a most useful *memento vivere* or *memento mori* to all of us who talk glibly of the holiness of beauty and its social mission. "The Kreutzer Sonata" probably aroused universal hostility less by its morbid and unchaste (monkish!) kind of chastity, than by its terribly true criticism of so much corruption and enervation hidden secure in the sacred mysteries of marriage and family life. And the writings on War are but the more moving and more explicit development of the remark of Tarde's, that, if the Past had not left us engines and institutions for warfare, the reciprocal destruction of national life and wealth would certainly never have originated in times as comparatively rational as ours. These and similar attacks on various forms of our smug moral callousness or vainglorious moral barbarism, are summed up in a thought which recurs throughout Tolstoi's works, beginning with his great novels:

"All this comes about, thanks solely to that social and administrative machinery whose business it is to subdivide the responsibility for evil done, in such fashion that no one should feel to what extent these acts are contrary to his nature. . . . *It is sufficient if a man free himself for an instant from this tangled net, in order to see the things which are contrary to his nature.*"

That is exactly what Tolstoi does for us. His unsociable and sceptical temper, his constitutional fault-finding, allow him to see, and to show us, one of the

chief drawbacks (for every moral machinery, every human or cosmic arrangement has its drawback) of that normal automatic living from impulse to impulse, or, if you choose, from hand to mouth, which secures the continuance and improvement of the race, and, on the whole, the tolerable happiness of the individual. The question "Why?" "To what purpose?" which becomes, in the case of some of Tolstoi's heroes and in his own, misery and paralysis when applied to the *totality of existence itself*, is salutary when we apply it every now and then to the detail of life. For it is then no longer : "What is the use of my being alive?" but the wholly different query : "Why, being alive, being what I am and wishing in a given way, am I nevertheless acting in this other way, which is inconsistent with my general life, personality and wishes?"

Yes ; there is need of such occasional scattering of our best-established habits and most necessary shams and shibboleths. Nietzsche is right in asking for a constant "revaluing of all standards of value." Only—what Nietzsche did not guess, and the world does not recognise—such has been the mission not of Epicureans and Cynics (falling in, as they do, with everyday habits), but of the far more ruthless, because more mono-ideistic and more unpractical, destructiveness of the prophets of asceticism.

Moreover, apart from its constant criticism of moral routine and its indefatigable exposure of perfunctoriness and hypocrisy, apart from its negative merit in demolishing so many cherished *vital lies*, and making the individual soul stand without shelter from the lightnings and the whirlwinds of the spiritual heavens ;

apart from its great functions of destruction (bringing, in Christ's words, "not peace, but a sword"), all progress owes a deep debt to asceticism of every denomination. For asceticism has given success to unworldliness, and made modesty and scrupulousness illustrious. The adoration of the *saint*, the triumphant enshrining of his poor bones, has been a salutary practice; since, even if that saint's virtues were mistaken, it was the desire for virtue, for acceptableness in God's eyes, which made him glorious in the eyes of men. It has been a help to progress that sanctity could compensate for poverty and weakness—nay, that poverty and weakness should have their disgrace removed; and more particularly in times when poverty was as often the result of one's neighbour's unscrupulousness as of one's own lack of initiative; and weakness was better for others than being a ruffian.

The school which has arisen in violent antagonism to ascetic self-denial, that of Nietzsche and the "Will to Power," bred, as it is, in times of comparative liberty and safety for the individual, has overlooked the fact that, in the past, a handful of stupid roughs, or the caprice of a delirious crowned degenerate, could in ten minutes destroy the results of years and years of industry, ingenuity, self-command, in fact, of every combination of intellectual, moral and physical efficiency. In such a past,—and it is still at our door (I write within a week of the suppression of the St. Petersburg rising)—the saint is the necessary corrective, in mankind's judgment, for the atrocious success of the violent man or the intriguer. And, so long as we continue abetting success which is obtained

to the detriment of others, so long shall we require the worship of the saint as such. Asceticism is the inevitable outcome, because it is the natural corrective, of moral callousness. And, so long as the market and the home are no better than they are, we shall require to retire now and again into a church—built, if not of stone, then of reverent thoughts—in commemoration of some just, and gentle and austere man. Nay, we shall require to feel at times the impulse to self-chastisement, self-abasement and self-mutilation, so long as our daily life remains as thoughtless, mean, grasping and bestial as it often is.

And herein lies the secret of Tolstoi, as of all ascetics and prophets: of his exaggerations, his absurdities, his—let us call them by their rightful name—ravings; and of our listening, and feeling that we are right in listening, to them.

The destructiveness of asceticism is blind and excessive; it behoves our spiritual activity and discipline to make use of this dangerous moral force, as of any of the other forces of nature, bidding it work for our benefit and not to our hurt. But, even while we remain unable to direct it to our purposes, this disruptive energy of asceticism and prophecy is one of the necessary purifiers of our stagnating souls. It is good to be asked, "To what purpose?" by a Tolstoi, although our answer may differ so widely from the one he preaches.



TOLSTOÏ ON ART



## TOLSTOI ON ART

LEO TOLSTOI'S recent volume on Art closes significantly the series of his arraignments of what we have been pleased to call civilisation. Like all his later works, whether treatise or play or novel or parable, this volume on art shows Tolstoi in his character of lay prophet, with all its powers and all its weaknesses. For it would seem—we notice it in two other great lay prophets, Carlyle and Ruskin—that the gift of seeing through the accepted falsehoods of the present, and foretelling the improbable realities of the future, can arise only in creatures too far overpowered by their own magnificent nature to understand other men's ways of being and thinking; in minds so bent upon how things should be as to lose sight of how things are and how things came to be. While Carlyle, embodying his passionate instincts in historical narrative, was moderated at least by his knowledge of the past and of the consequent origin and necessity of the present; while Ruskin, accepting the whole moral and religious training of his times, was in so far in touch with his contemporaries; Tolstoi has broken equally with everything, if ever he had really much to break with. Destitute of all historic sense, impervious to any form of science, and accepting



the Gospel only as the nominal text for a religion of his own making, he has become incapable of admitting more than one side to any question, more than one solution to any difficulty, more than one factor in any phenomenon. He is destitute of all sense of cause and effect, all acquiescence in necessity, and all real trustfulness in the ways of the universe. For him most things are wrong, wholly, utterly wrong; their wrongness has never originated in any right, and never will be transformed into right until—well, until mankind be converted to Tolstoi's theory and practice. Economic and domestic arrangements, laws, politics, religion, all wrong; and now, art also.

Unreasonableness like this is contagious, and Tolstoi's criticisms have often been dismissed as utterly wrong-headed. But we should not forego the benefits which the prophetic gift can bring us, if only we know how to extract them. We should endeavour to eliminate the hallucinations which usually accompany such penetrating moral insight, and to apply some of this vast spiritual energy with more discrimination than was compatible with its violent and almost tragic production. The use of a genius like Tolstoi's is to show us in what particulars human institutions, habits, and thoughts are morally wrong; it is for us to find out what his very prophet's onesidedness prevents his doing—the rational explanation of this wrongness.

With regard to art, Tolstoi's opinion of its moral wrongness can be analysed into two very separate and independent views. Art, as practised and conceived in our times, is immoral, according to Tolstoi, first:

because it fails to accomplish its only legitimate mission of directly increasing the instincts of justice, pity, and self-renunciation ; and secondly : because any mission, good or bad, which it does fulfil is limited to a very small fraction of mankind. In other words, according to Tolstoi, art is a useless, often a corrupting, luxury ; and a luxury of that minority which already enjoys more luxuries than are compatible with the material welfare of the rest of the world and with its own spiritual advantage.

The two propositions must be taken separately for examination in the light of certain sciences which, alas, Tolstoi condemns outright as themselves useless, mendacious, and corrupting. Now this condemnation by Tolstoi of all science, this misconception of the very nature of science, will help us to a rapid understanding of one half of his condemnation of art—its condemnation as morally useless. There is not enough justice or sympathy, not enough purity, endurance, or self-renunciation in the world—that is the gospel Tolstoi has to preach ; and, with prophetic onesidedness, he condemns everything which does not directly and obviously increase these virtues. So long as it is neither unjust nor cruel nor rapacious nor impure, it matters nothing to Tolstoi whether life be varied or monotonous, elastic and adaptive or narrow and unadaptive, lucid or dull, enterprising or stagnant, complete or mutilated, pleasant or devoid of pleasure ; it never occurs to him that in the great organic give-and-take, those very qualities which he so exclusively desires depend for their existence on the fulness and energy of every side of human existence. Tolstoi wants

virtue, and only virtue, dominant, exclusive; and he thinks that virtue can be got independent of everything else, perfect and instantaneous. Hence he naturally disdains mere intellectual activity, and misunderstands the object of all science.

"The important and suitable object of human science," he writes explicitly, "ought not to be the learning of those things which happen to be interesting: but the learning of the manner in which we should direct our lives: the learning of those religious, moral, and social truths without which all our so-called knowledge of nature must be either useless or fatal." Hence, practically, no science; for Tolstoi's definition of a moral or social truth is not a moral or social fact or generalisation, but simply a precept for conduct; truth, in his special vocabulary, means no longer the faithful presentation of what is, but unflinching insistence on what ought to be. As with science, so with art.

"The religious consciousness of our time consists, speaking generally, in the recognition that our happiness, material and spiritual, individual and collective, momentary and permanent, consists in the brotherhood of all men, in our union for a life in common . . . and those works of art only should be esteemed and encouraged which grow out of the religion of our day, whereas all works of art contrary to this religion should be condemned, and all the rest of art treated with indifference."

Like science, therefore, art is set by Tolstoi to enforce virtue, not, as he orders science, by precepts, but by embodying and communicating such emotion

as conduces directly to greater morality ; no reference being made, in this case either, to the fact that virtue cannot long exist save in a many-sided, energetic, and harmonious life, of which the impulse to art, like the impulse to science, is an essential element. On these principles, "art," continues Tolstoi, "should always be valued according to its contents," that is to say, according to the definite moral example which it exhibits, or the definite moral emotion—chiefly pity, of course—which it awakens. The practical result is the banishing, as no longer consonant with our moral purposes, of nearly all the art of former times, including Antiquity and the Middle Ages ; and the absolute condemnation of more than two-thirds of all modern art, including not merely Wagner, Impressionism, Symbolism, Pre-Raphaelitism, but all Tolstoi's earlier work—"Anna Karénina" and "War and Peace"—nearly all of Goethe's, and, after minute examination, even the "Ninth Symphony." There remain, besides the Gospels, the more obviously moralising works of Victor Hugo and of Dickens, "Uncle Tom's Cabin," and whatever painting, sculpture, and music may be discovered having a moral purpose as definite and unmistakable as these.

This statement is crude, and Tolstoi's plea, judging from it, would seem to be mere fanatical dogmatism. But this is far from being the case : Tolstoi is learned and is subtle, and twists facts powerfully to suit his views. Tolstoi has read, or caused to be examined for his benefit, almost everything that ever has been written on the nature and aims of art ; and, in a chapter where profound lack of sympathy is thinly

disguised as intellectual impartiality, he has reviewed and dismissed every theory of art which differs from his own. The science of æsthetics, necessarily dependent as it is upon psychology, sociology, and anthropology, all as yet imperfect, is in a backward state ; and an immense proportion of the "philosophy of art" is either pure metaphysics, scornful of concrete fact, or mere polemic founded on the practice of one school or period. This backward state of æsthetics has rendered it, from Plato to Spencer, and from Ruskin to Whistler, the happy hunting ground of every philosopher lacking the experience of art, and of every art connoisseur lacking the habit of philosophy ; and has given Tolstoi the immense advantage of finding not merely a marvellous amount of foolish utterance to scoff at, but, what is more to his purpose, a mutual contradiction between all the main theories. All philosophers, Tolstoi is able to tell us, have insisted on the extreme nobility of art, and a great many have dogmatised about beauty being art's special object ; but there is not one single intelligible account of beauty, and there are three or four conflicting main definitions of art ; a proof that, as Tolstoi has so often proclaimed, all science and all philosophy are worthless, and that art can have no legitimate object save the moral one which he assigns to it. But it happens that even nowadays the psychological and historical treatment of æsthetics is beginning to put order and lucidity into the subject, and to reconcile while it explains the conflict in all previous views. It is in the light of such science, however much despised by Tolstoi, that we shall attempt to show that art, like

science itself, like philosophy, like every great healthy human activity, has a right to live and a duty to fulfil, quite apart from any help it may contribute to the enforcement of a moralist's teachings.

It is necessary to premise that, like nearly every other writer on æsthetics, Tolstoi has needlessly complicated the question by considering literature as the type of all other art. Now it is clear that literature, although in one capacity an art as much as music or painting, is, at the same time, and in varying degree, a mode of merely imparting opinion or stirring up emotion, the instrument, not merely of the artist, but of the thinker, the historian, the preacher, and the pleader. This being the case, it is unfair to judge the question of art by the whole practice of literature; it is necessary, on the contrary, so long as we are dealing with æsthetics, to consider only those sides of literature in which it resembles the other, more purely artistic, more typical arts. Putting literature therefore aside, on account of the multiplicity of its appeals to human interest, we shall find that, roughly speaking, while philosophers have given to art one of two large functions, imitation or expression—and practical craftsmen have inclined to judge of art as if its chief function were either invention or execution, newness of construction or dexterity of handling—the immense majority of art-loving mankind, including the philosophers and the artists in their merely human capacity, have accepted or rejected, cherished or neglected, single works of art, exactly in proportion as these works gave them the particular kind of pleasure connected with the word *beauty*. The

meaning of this word *beauty* it is difficult, and, in the present backward state of æsthetic science, perhaps impossible, to define. It implies a relation between certain visible or audible phenomena (and in literature certain still more complex purely mental phenomena) and the spectator or listener; and the exact nature of these visible or audible phenomena, which we objectify in the word *form*, differs from art to art, from style to style, and from individual work to individual work, there existing practically endless numbers of ways of being *beautiful*—that is to say, of producing in the human being 'the very specific emotion aroused by what we call *beauty*. What may be this common character of all these different so-called beautiful visual or audible forms or patterns, is evidently a question of psychological and, in part, of physiological science; and, different as are the modes of action of different arts and different styles of art, and deficient as is at present our analysis and observation of the modes of influence of any of them, we may yet affirm with confidence that the progress of science will one day explain that particular relation between certain visible and audible forms and the human being which is brought about by what we call *beauty*, as a relation involving, whatever its particular kind, a general momentary advantage to the vital, nervous, mental, and bodily conditions, and accompanied, as all beneficent conscious phenomena are, by the condition called *pleasure*.

To recapitulate: the quality called *beauty*, recognised in the most various kinds and styles of art, marks the awakening of a specific sort of pleasure, at present

neither analysable nor explicable, but which, like all the other varieties of pleasure, can be instantly identified, though not described, by any one who has experienced it. But although it is this quality of *beauty*, this specific pleasurable emotion connected with the word *beautiful*, which practically decides the eventual acceptance or rejection of a work of art, yet the theories connecting art with imitation and expression, with invention and execution, represent also a large and important side of the question. For history and anthropology point clearly to the fact that art very rarely originates from a conscious desire for beauty, but that it arises out of the practical requirements, material or spiritual—building, weaving, pottery, dress, war, and ritual—of mankind, and out of a superabundance of the great primary instincts of imitation and expression, of construction, invention, and manipulation. These instincts, which are explicable only as immediate reactions of the human organism upon its surroundings, have been carried by natural selection to an intensity so considerable as often (in the case of children, for instance) to surpass all practical requirements, so that they have to vent themselves in that gratuitous exercise which has suggested to Mr. Spencer (as it had done to Schiller) the notion that art was the result of special *play instincts*. Play instincts, as such, there are probably none; but it is certain that all art has arisen from the activity—whether utilitarian or aimless—of the tendencies to imitate, to express, to invent, to construct, to manipulate, and to perform. But what differentiates art from the mere practical or aimless exercise of these impulses



is the fact that, in its case, these impulses have been controlled by that totally different and specific instinct which demands that, useful or useless, the forms presented to the mind through the eye and the ear should possess the absolutely peculiar quality of *beauty*. That which has caused the imitation of an object or the expression of an emotion to be respected after the utility thereof has vanished or the impulse to imitate or express has died out ; that which has caused the shape of a building, the pattern of a stuff or a pot, the movements of a dance, the picture of an object, to be desired for their own sake, is the peculiar kind of pleasure which the quite unpractical, quite disinterested contemplation of the object or pattern or representation or game has been able to produce by virtue of its beauty. The instinct for beauty is not, in all probability, one of the creative faculties of man. It does not set people working, it does not drive them to construct, to imitate, or to express, any more than the moral instinct sets people wishing and acting, or the logical instinct sets them reasoning. It is, even more typically than the moral and logical instincts, a *categorical imperative*, which imperiously decides whether given forms are to be tolerated, cherished, or avoided.

In thus recognising that the instinct for beauty is not a creative but a regulative impulse of mankind, modern psychology, so far from diminishing its importance, increases it enormously and explains it. For the very fact that the instincts of expression and imitation, of construction, invention, manipulation, and performance, have in all their most practical applications (in building, clothing, fabrics of all sorts,

and every kind of ritual) been so constantly interfered with, and in their *play capacity* (save in children) been so utterly captured, by an instinct so merely regulative as the instinct for beauty, proves, to any one accustomed to modern scientific thought, that this mysterious, unaccountable, apparently useless pleasure arising from certain form relations which we call *beautiful* must eventually be explained and accounted for by some deep-seated vital utility to the mind and the nervous system of the human race. Therefore we would answer, not to Count Tolstoi, for whom all scientific explanations are mere lumber, but to those readers of Tolstoi whom his arguments may have shaken, first : that the apparent conflict in æsthetic theory represents only the various factors of a complex problem ; and secondly, that the constant return to the belief that art's eventual aim is to produce beauty, and even the very mystery which at present surrounds this indefinable and as yet inexplicable quality, go to prove that, in a world different from the monotonous ascetic, unorganic world conceived by Tolstoi, in a world of life the most complex, overflowing and organic—not merely negative moral virtue, but physical beauty, as much as intellectual lucidity, is required, and, by the nature of things, will eternally be required and produced.

But Tolstoi's plea against art is double, and we have so far disposed, even in our own eyes, of only one of its halves. Even if the theory were right, the practice would remain wrong, and could not be set right by any amount of arguing. For, however beneficial the enjoyment of beauty, the benefit must

be confined to the cases where the beauty is actually enjoyed ; and, however desirable a function art may fulfil in human existence, the function is limited to the lives into which art does actually enter. Now beauty, Tolstoi points out, even supposing it to exist, requires, in nine-tenths of all art, a special training before it is so much as perceived ; and moreover, art of any kind, appreciated or not appreciated, does not (he says) come near the existence of the immense majority of mankind, roughly speaking, of all the classes who work with their hands. On the one hand, there are galleries, exhibitions, and concerts where works of art are displayed and performed which can give pleasure only after elaborate initiation ; on the other hand, there are millions of human beings who never come near a gallery, an exhibition, or a concert room, because they have neither the money nor the leisure to enter it. This being the case—and Tolstoi seems to us irrefragably right in this matter so far at least as he is speaking of actualities, and not of what is abstractly true or possible—it is mere nonsense and cant to talk of the usefulness of art to mankind as a whole, and the only sincere statement is that of the cynical and immoral persons who calmly admit that art is one of the many luxuries of the rich and leisured minority, and is maintained for their sole enjoyment (according to Tolstoi's economics) by the labour of the poor and overworked majority.

In attempting to answer this second plea against art, we must again premise that we can do so only with the aid of those psychological and historical sciences which Tolstoi disdains like all others, and in the light more particularly of that same critical knowledge of art

which he denounces as a chief source of perversion in these matters. Let us begin with the question of the necessity of training before artistic beauty can be enjoyed, and with Tolstoi's implied corollary that beauty which is not spontaneously recognised cannot really respond to any deep-seated or indeed genuine demand of human nature. One of Tolstoi's chief instances in point is that of the modern school of impressionist painters. He describes, without any exaggeration, the hopeless mental confusion of an educated person on first being introduced to a collection of impressionist pictures. We can all of us remember similar remarks on dozens of similar occasions, and, if our memory is good, and we do not happen to have been brought up in impressionist studios from our infancy, we can probably also remember having said or thought the very same things ourselves: the objects represented are in most cases not recognised, the drawing and perspective seem utterly wrong, and the effects of colour and light the result of something near akin to lunacy. •

Tolstoi's description is perfectly accurate, but his deductions are unwarrantable, for what he has not seen is that impressionist painters represent the most advanced section of a school of painting which has broken with all past tradition and which is avowedly seeking to represent effects of perspective, or colour, and of light which have never been attempted before, and to do so in reference to subjects—casually chosen pieces of landscape, for instance—which have hitherto been disdained, and in disregard of all the established tenets of symmetrical composition. Now the most

advanced art of any age, like the most advanced thought of any age, is really not for the period which produces it, but for the next, whether that *next* come within two years or within twenty or a hundred years ; and the art of a class, like the mode of dress and speech of a class, takes time to descend to the classes below. From the nature of things no novelty can arise save in a comparatively small circle, originally in the small circle of an artistic school, or even in the mind of one individual artist. We cannot feel the beauty of an artistic form which we do not really see, any more than we can feel the cogency of an argument we do not really follow ; and the act of perception is not any simpler or more rapid or spontaneous than the act of intellectual apprehension. We do not see an unfamiliar pattern, we do not hear an unusual combination of sounds, with the rapidity and completeness given by habit and by expectation. The enjoyment of the quality called *beauty* is the enjoyment of a certain set of visible or audible relations, and these relations are by no means taken in immediately. The emotion of æsthetic pleasure can take place only when any given kind of artistic form has been assimilated by the mind ; and the possibility, the mode, of assimilation is handed on by imitation from the more prepared individual to the less prepared ; while, on the other hand, each new form, like each new thought, is assimilated in proportion as it resembles an already familiar one. Every new work of art, nay, every form of which a whole work of art consists, is different from all its predecessors, at least in its combinations ; it is a new individual, which we get to know at first by what it

has in common with previous individuals of the same class. The new picture or poem or song, which we see or read or hear for the first time, represents a mental, æsthetic, emotional step made by us ; it means an alteration, great or small, of attitude, like that produced by a new logical proposition, even if the new picture or poem or song be as closely connected with a previous one as a new proposition of Euclid is with earlier propositions. To expect a person totally unfamiliar with all similar art to comprehend, to *see*, let alone to enjoy, an impressionist picture, is like expecting a person, who is familiar with nothing beyond a rule-of-three sum, to follow some new problem of the higher mathematics.

Such facts and principles as these have never occurred to Tolstoi. He has never conceived the human faculties as being in a state of constant alteration and evolution ; he does not recognise that what we find established and apparently spontaneous in the present has been brought about by the adjustments and the efforts of the past ; and he mistakes for innate tendencies what in reality are the result of long unconscious or conscious training. "The majority of men," he says, "has always understood all that we consider as the highest art : the book of Genesis, the parables of the Gospels, and the various popular legends, stories, and songs." No doubt, the "majority of men" has understood them in those countries and times in which they happen to have been familiar. But would the opening chapters of Genesis be more comprehensible to a person brought up entirely out of touch with Christianity or Judaism than the Prologue in Heaven

of "Faust"? Would the intricate forms and special allusions of the north-country ballad, of the Tuscan lyric or the Spanish song, be more intelligible to a person totally unacquainted with anything of the kind than "Sister Helen," or a "Sonnet from the Portuguese," or Verlaine's "Clair de Lune"? What Tolstoi mistakes for a naturally, inevitably intelligible and enjoyable character in art is in reality an affinity, a resemblance, with forms of art already familiar. We are now beginning to see in what way all artistic enjoyment can require a degree of previous training, and yet be, to all appearance, absolutely spontaneous. For just as a capacity to appreciate the new grows insensibly out of familiarity with the old, so also does a new form of art, under normal conditions, grow out of an old form by a series of alterations very gentle and easy to follow, although their extremes may represent styles of art as utterly unlike as the music of Wagner and the music of Mozart, or may be as far apart as the pointed architecture of the thirteenth century and the round-arched architecture of the fifth, from which it undoubtedly sprang; a process which we can realise if we remember that although Latin is no longer intelligible to an uneducated Frenchman or Italian, yet there could never have been a moment of non-comprehension during the centuries which evolved the modern languages from the ancient one.

But mere gradual evolution would not be sufficient to explain the insensible training which has made the appreciation of various artistic forms apparently spontaneous. The art, whatever it might be, was not only absolutely continuous, but widely diffused. We must

here remember what we before pointed out, that the desire for beauty is a regulative function, and that it imposes its preferences upon the expressive and imitative impulses, the activities of invention, construction, and execution which mankind displays for practical purposes or as a mere pastime. Hence, in times which are normal, any artistic form is found—and all art-history is there to prove it—not merely in those very conspicuous and developed branches which we think of more particularly as *art*, but in every form of cognate craft. The language and the allusions employed by even so learned and artificial a poet as Dante were the language and allusions of the least cultivated of his contemporaries, to the extent of making his poem the favourite reading of artisans and peasants. The forms, the modelling, the anatomy, the essential ways of being of line and surface in Greek sculpture can be recognised, to a greater or less degree, in the commonest Greek pottery, bronze work, cheap domestic ornaments, and so forth ; the very special forms, so difficult to imitate, and even to grasp after much study, of what we call Gothic, appear in the very humblest building, in every chair, table, embroidery, or piece of iron-work of the later Middle Ages ; while the modulations and rhythms, and in great part the harmonies, of every past form of music have always been common to the most humble and to the highest categories of the art : the lower, like the more provincial branches of art, according to the law of imitation we have before alluded to, being always just a little behind the work of the creative masters in the highest branches and in the greatest centres. This universal diffusion of a given fashion in art—fashion



in dress is perhaps the only modern representative of this state of things—explains how a whole population could be, so to speak, constantly in presence of any given style of art, and able gradually to appreciate its variations without any apparent previous training. The mediæval artisan was as able to appreciate the most far-fetched and subtle of all forms of art, the Gothic—and for the same reason—as the modern Japanese of the lower class is able to appreciate peculiarities of perspective, of form, and of execution which strike even the educated European as exotic, and which cannot be enjoyed by him without some special study.

This, as we have remarked, is the state of affairs in *normal times*; for we must be careful to underline this qualification. Tolstoi, with his deficient historical sense, and his tendency to believe in an unvarying typical man (more or less represented by the Russian peasant of to-day), has not recognised the prevalence of this normal condition throughout the past, nor, of course, the reasons through which, as Mr. Ruskin taught some forty years ago, this normal condition has become more and more exceptional in the present. It is, however, easy to understand why our century, with its quite unparalleled rapidity and complexity of change, must differ in this respect from all others. As regards the continuity of artistic development, there have been and still are two notable causes of disturbance: the opening up of foreign civilisations and the importation of exotic kinds of art (like that of Japan), and the archæological revival of the art of the past, for instance, the Greek and the Gothic. From these have resulted

both an impulse of imitation and an effort after novelty, the latter due both to facility of new combinations and to resistance against foreign or historical influence. Now an art which, like that of Burne-Jones or of Whistler, is half archæological or half exotic, cannot possibly be appreciated without some degree of familiarity with the Mediæval or the Japanese art from which it has partly sprung ; while, on the other hand, an art like that of Manet, Monnet, and Rodin has evidently been pushed into excessive novelty by a violent revulsion from the officially accepted forms and methods of the painting and sculpture of the Renaissance and of Antiquity.

There is in the art of this century a degree of individualism, an amount of archæological and exotic research, an obvious desire for novelty at any price, which renders it less organic, less natural, than the art of past times. The result is that its appreciation is no longer attainable by the unconscious training which is conferred by familiarity with previous art, and demands special initiation through critical study. Among our contemporaries it is a matter of everyday experience to find persons extremely appreciative of Greek or Gothic art who yet, like Mr. Ruskin, can see absolutely nothing in the art of modern France ; while there are practical artists who can see absolutely nothing save archaic quaintness in the art of Antiquity and of the Renaissance ; to such an extent are the perception and enjoyment of one kind of form impeded by the habit and preoccupation of another. Such being the case with the artistic classes themselves, how much more must it be the case with the general public ! And from

this general public we are obliged in our century to exclude completely the enormous majority of mankind. Tolstoi has not exaggerated matters in saying that barely one man in a hundred comes nowadays within reach of art, appreciated or unappreciated. For here we find ourselves in presence of the other and far greater difference which separates the æsthetic conditions of our century from those of every previous one. The industrial and economic changes accompanying the development of machinery have virtually, as Mr. Ruskin pointed out, put an end for the moment to all that handicraft which formed the fringe of the artistic activity of the past, and which kept the less favoured classes in such contact with the artistic forms of their time and country that, for instance, the pottery and brass-work of the humbler classes of Greece, and the wood-work and textile fabrics of the poorest citizens of the Middle Ages, let alone every kind of domestic architecture, afforded sufficient preparation for the greatest art of temples and cathedrals: a daily, hourly preparation, embodying in many cases actual mechanical familiarity. Nowadays, on the contrary, objects of utility, machine-made, and no longer expressive of any preferences, are either totally without æsthetic quality, or embody, in a perfunctory and imperfect manner, the superficial and changing æsthetic fashions of a very small minority. Nor is this all. The extreme rapidity of scientific discovery and mechanical invention, the growing desire for technical education and hygienic advantage, the race for material comfort and the struggles for intellectual and social equality—in fact, the whole immense movement of our times, both

for good and for evil—have steadily tended to make art less and less a reality even in the lives of the leisured classes, and have resulted in virtually effacing all vestige of it from the lives of working men.

Art, therefore, we may concede to Tolstoi, is in our days largely artificial, often unwholesome, always difficult of appreciation, and, above all, a luxury. Violent and even fanatical as are Tolstoi's words on this subject, they hardly exaggerate the present wrongness of things.

But we hope to have suggested in the course of these criticisms that the present condition of art does not justify Tolstoi's proposal that in the future art should be reduced to being a mere adjunct of ethical education, or, failing that, should be banished from the world as futile or degrading. In pointing out, as we have done, the imperious nature of that desire for beauty which normally regulates all the practical constructive energies of mankind, and subdues to its purposes all human impulses to imitation and expression, imposing a *how* entirely separate and *sui generis*; and in clearing up that confusion among conflicting æsthetic theories of which Tolstoi has taken such advantage, we have brought home, we hope, to the reader the presumption that an instinct so special and so powerful must play some very important part in the bodily and mental harmony of man. Further, while indicating the natural mechanism by which, under normal circumstances, the appreciation and enjoyment of artistic forms have kept pace with their changes, and familiarity with the various kinds of beauty in the humblest and commonest objects

of utility has rendered spontaneous the perception of the same kinds of beauty in their higher, more complex, and less utilitarian developments, we have shown that this special and imperious æsthetic craving has created its own natural and universal modes of satisfaction. We have seen that art, considered as the production of beautiful objects or arrangements, has been spontaneously produced, spontaneously enjoyed, and universally diffused, in one or other of its categories, throughout the whole of the past ; and, having taken notice of the disturbing influences which have interrupted this normal condition of things in the present, we have shown reason to expect a return thereunto in the future. The wrong condition of things with regard to art is the result of other wrong conditions, intellectual, social, and economic, inevitable in a period of excessive, complex, and, so to speak, compound, change ; and as these wrong conditions cannot fail to right themselves, the adjustment of the question of art will follow as the result of other adjustments. In what precise manner this may take place it would be presumptuous to forecast ; but this much may be affirmed, that the ascetic subordination of art to ethical teaching will play no part in it. Imperfect, and even in some ways intolerable to our moral sense, as is the present condition of art, as Tolstoi has victoriously demonstrated, let those among us whom it offends reflect that even under such evident wrong conditions it is not mere selfishness to preserve the art of the past and foster the art of the present for the benefit of a more just and wholesome, a more developed and more traditionally normal, future. Moreover art, like science and like practical

well-being, will in the long run take care of itself; because, despite Tolstoi's statement to the contrary, art, like morality itself, is necessary to mankind's full and harmonious life.



NIETZSCHE AND THE “WILL TO  
POWER”





## NIETZSCHE AND THE "WILL TO POWER"

### I

THE fact that Friedrich Nietzsche, when released from life at only fifty-six, had already survived his reasonable soul by nearly eleven years, disposes of his philosophy with miraculous satisfactoriness for some of his opponents. But it is liable to make those feel almost abashed who do not relish such cheap irony on the part of Fate.

I wish to make it plain, therefore, that, though the final catastrophe of this great mind appears to me to have had constitutional causes and preliminary symptoms which affected the doomed man's manner of being and therefore of thinking, yet it is my conviction that the psychological interest and moral importance of what, following his own example, I venture to designate as "the Case of Nietzsche" would have been quite as real, though less vulgarly obvious, had it never been rounded off by so frightful a logico-dramatic coincidence. If, therefore, I proceed to deal with Nietzsche's philosophy as the expression of spiritual and bodily unhealthiness, let it be understood that I am referring only to the kind of madness

which Nietzsche's Wise Man prayed for—"Give me, ye Powers, madness, that I may believe in myself!"—and not at all to the miserable obliteration of mind with which an atrocious and stupid destiny was preparing to answer that prayer. For it is with this "madness that he might believe in himself" that I intend to deal in the following pages.

The soundest and, therefore, the most living and fertile part of a philosopher's work is, perhaps, that which makes him not unlike, but like, his fellows; nay, the possibility of being assimilated by the future is, in many cases, in direct proportion to the fact of having been assimilated from the past. But my object, in the present study, has not been the extracting of what I consider the most valuable productions of Nietzsche's extraordinary mind; all the various "selections, philosophies and quintessences" of Nietzsche are amply sufficient in their unintentional misrepresentation of him as a typically sane, sound and socially normal thinker. My object has been, on the contrary, to collect into a synthetic group (the synthesis representing Nietzsche's individual temperament) those peculiarities which differentiate him from nearly all other equally great thinkers; peculiarities which bring him into conflict, not merely, as he gloried in feeling, with the mental habits of hypocrites, Philistines and decadents, but with the modes of thinking and feeling indispensable for the continuance of the human race, and therefore deeply ingrained in the human race's composition. I desire, in short, to see what was at the bottom of Nietzsche's characteristic

views of life, in order to judge whether life is likely to cultivate or to weed out the type of philosophy and this type of philosopher.

"There is no Will to Existence," says Zarathustra ; "for what does not yet exist, cannot will ; and, as to that which does exist, how could it possibly will to exist?"

Besides a combination of a truism ("that which does not exist, cannot will") with an entirely unproven assumption ("that which does exist cannot will to exist"), we have here a confusion between an abstract metaphorical statement and an individual concrete fact. Philosophically speaking, no one has ever attributed to the individual human being dominant, unfailling desire for continued existence, so that its denial cannot be the core of Zarathustra's supreme discovery ; and we must look for that in the denial of that metaphorical Will under which the genius of Schopenhauer adumbrated the great generalisations of modern biology. The necessity of growing, reproducing, varying, adapting, of surviving at any price, this, and this only, can be called the Will to Existence. But this is an abstraction, an allegory, though a perfectly fitting one, and the Will to Existence can be postulated, and has been postulated, only of that abstract and allegorical entity, the Species. For this Will to Existence Nietzsche, in probably conscious contradiction to his discarded master, Schopen-

hauer, tries therefore to substitute a Will to Power; and the form of speech renders such a substitution superficially possible; Will is will, and you need only write "Power" after effacing "Existence." But this operation is a delusion or a piece of trickery, an attempt at exchanging things which do not belong to the same category. Looking at that abstraction called "the Species," and expressing our generalisations about it under the metaphorical form of Will, we are struck immediately by the utter indifference manifested by the Species to any such relation as is implied by the word "Power"; and by the metaphorical readiness which the Species displays, on the contrary, for proceedings absolutely negatived by the word "Power": a readiness to alter, to dwindle, to lie low, to degenerate, to submit to any tyranny, privation or parasitic condition, or even to self-mutilation rather than allow itself to die. Indeed, the survival through self-effacement, as distinguished from self-assertion (and power implies self-assertion), is so frequent an occurrence in the life of Species, that I cannot read Nietzsche's description of the methods towards survival attributed by him to primitive Christian communities, without thinking of some naturalist's account of a sort of animal which, after living in decent independence on land or in water, has got itself imprisoned, by the ruthless Will to Existence, in the diseased body of some more powerful kind of creature. So that, if Zarathustra meant to replace Schopenhauer's great Will, the Will to Existence, tingling (as we seem to feel it) throughout the universe, by his more "*vornehm*" Will to Power, he

must take back his remark ; for Nature cares nothing for his new scale of values.

Nor is this all. The Will to Power may and does exist as an individual phenomenon. But (and here we begin our real examination of Nietzsche's views in reference to that very "Life," which he thought he so aristocratically accepted), whatever exists in the individual is, speaking metaphorically, yet very correctly, subject to the Will of the Species ; and the Will of the Species is, as we have seen, the mere Will to Existence. Like any other peculiarity, the Will to Power develops so long as it conduces to survival, and atrophies to the extent to which it becomes a danger. The individual who possesses it either flourishes and hands it on to his descendants and his imitators, or comes to grief and carries the quality which has ruined him into helplessness or annihilation.

Thus the Will to Existence, of which, as of all other divinities, the exclusive pride of Nietzsche would not brook the reality, shows itself to be a god of most ruthless practicality ; and every other kind of volition, every instinct, habit or tendency of living creatures, all the *demiurgi*, Olympian or subterranean, radiantly conscious or obscurely and blindly teeming, can hold their sway only at its inexorable behest.

Translated into prosaic literalness, the question may therefore be stated as follows : Does the predominance of self-consciousness and the assertion of the ego, which, taken together, constitute Nietzsche's Will to Power, offer such advantages to the human race as to have fostered this Will to Power to an exorbitant

degree in the past, or as to foster it, so far as we can foresee, to still completer supremacy in the future? We may get an approximate answer to this question in the course of examining some of the mental and emotional tendencies and habits which Nietzsche condemns in mankind, as the unworthy rivals to the Will to Power, and perhaps arrive at some conclusion by subsequently glancing also at the position which Nietzsche takes up towards life as a whole, that is to say, towards that Will to Existence of which he so rudely denies the existence.

### III

First and foremost among the opponents to the Will to Power is what we may roughly sum up as Duty. Conspicuous among the prophecies of Zarathustra are those concerning the great Lion from out of the desert, who fights and destroys the great Dragon whose wings are inscribed with commandments. "Thou Shalt" is the name of the great Dragon, but the spirit of the Lion says, "I Will." While busy demolishing the Free Will of Christian and of Kantian ethics, Nietzsche had himself made a superb demonstration of the fundamental identity of that Lion "I Will" and that Dragon "Thou Shalt"; or, rather, he had shown that neither the Lion nor the Dragon had any kind of real existence. But, taken upon the plane of the illusion inevitable in our feeling, such a seeming division and opposition between the inner and the outer Will can and must be recognised ;

and Nietzsche could legitimately split up the Chimæra, Free Will, into the solitary, rebellious Lion and the obsequious, philistine Dragon. But, if we are to discuss not the metaphysics of Free Will, but the phenomenon of apparent alternative as manifest in experience, the question of *Thou Shalt* and *I Will* takes a different aspect.

There is more than a rough and ready practicality ("*pour encourager les autres*," like Voltaire's court martial on Admiral Byng) in the legal limitation of responsibility to such individuals as are neither idiots nor maniacs. For, as the appearance of volition exists only in the face of two conceivable modes of action, which imply consciousness, there can be no will, no choice, in cases where the instincts have the blind, automatic action of reflexes. There is, therefore, a greater appearance of volition in obeying a law and conforming to a standard than in acting under the undivided pressure of a habit or an appetite. Nietzsche was thoroughly aware of all this, and had, moreover, the proud and combative and self-centred man's excessive and unphilosophical scorn for anything like habits, blind instincts and reflexes. He therefore formulated (I was going to write: "he was therefore *obliged* to formulate," but these are words he never would have admitted with reference to himself) something opposed to obscure instinctive preferences, but opposed also to all categorical imperatives: an individual standard and law (including pretended subversion of all previous standards and laws), a private categorical imperative so rigid that slavery, degradation, Dantesque dung-ponds of igno-



miny; were the ineluctable punishment of their non-recognition ; let alone, of course, a fine preliminary bout of Zarathustrian philosophising on them "with the hammer."

Thus Nietzsche was never able to carry his individualism (as his predecessor Stirner had done) to its logical conclusion of anarchy inside as well as outside the individual. He committed the inconsequence (to which we owe some of his most beautiful and perhaps immortal sentences) of preaching the most rigorous hierarchy, and hierarchic commanding and obeying, within the soul of the lawbreaker himself. I call this an inconsequence, and hope to demonstrate that it was one ; fruitful, moreover, like many of the inconsequences of one-sided thinkers. Nietzsche, of course, asserted that this régime of categorical imperatives was the outcome, solely, of the individual himself ; and that the Zarathustrian person (to say nothing of the eventually coming "Uber-Mensch") went through this noviciate of purifications, professed this *rule* of vigils and chastenings (so singular in a theoretic opponent of asceticism), for the simple gratification of his own fine gentleman's *dist*. But, if we look at facts, this superlative Zarathustrian "good form" (for as such this moral Beau Brummel gives it us) is, like every other kind of *good form*, a product for which no isolated individuality could suffice, and for which no pressure of merely individual preference could originally account. It is essentially an historical, sociological product. Intent upon his own moral posturings and gestures (in which the old Stoical mantle, and even sundry Christian academic properties,

were unconsciously made use of), Nietzsche found it convenient to take for granted the ready-made Zarathustrian individual, attitudes, gestures, good taste and all; and therefore averted his glance from the genesis and evolution thereof. For, in that genesis and evolution of Zarathustra's "good taste," the principal part had been played throughout the centuries by that which Nietzsche most furiously disliked (reserving it to explain only the Socratic, Christian, Kantian, or other unclean spirits)—namely, the race at large, the instincts, claims and habits of the majority of human beings so utterly offensive to Nietzsche's sense of smell and somewhat queasy stomach. And, in a way, Nietzsche actually placed himself in the impossibility of denying such villainous origin, which a thoroughpaced anarchic thinker like Stirner would have made short work of, together with formulas, standards, and good taste of any kind. Nietzsche, as was inevitable in one who frankly objected to gods of all sorts—because, "if there were gods, how could he have endured not being one of them,"—Nietzsche, filling up his own horizon, had pretty well sent Nature (and the Will to Existence) to the Coventry of the Lucretian gods, and very rarely referred to her or it. But the possession of the finest taste unfortunately requires, not merely recognition, but a standard; and thus the isolated superfine individual was betrayed into calling on Nature's testimony to the correctness of his moral attitude and manner. "All the audacity, the fineness and keenness that have ever existed," he writes, "all the masterly certainty and dancelike spirit, have

developed themselves, thanks to the tyranny of such self-imposed law (*Willkür-Gesetze*), and it is by no means improbable that just this, and not a system of *laissez-aller*, is *nature* and *natural*." Nietzsche did not know how large a door he was opening in this second part of the sentence : a door, a gate, through which what should sweep in but that deposed, rejected, utterly banished Will to Existence? For, if the individual has not grown as a mere random jumble of uncoordinated instincts, this is explained by his not existing as an isolated individual, companionless, *in vacuo*. Man is, more or less, a composite and orderly whole because he is an integral part of a whole which can be only composite and orderly. *Naturalness*, which Nietzsche invoked as a final condemnation of spiritual anarchy, is merely a word for suitability to the ways of other things, adaptation to that great abstract whole which allows insubordinate doings neither in single individuals nor in single instincts. The *law-to-himself* of the finer human being is the expression of a more perfect and well-nigh automatic adaptation to the hierarchy outside. Nay, far below the sphere of such ethical good form, we find concentric circles of inner coordination, without which we could not move, stand, digest or grow, let alone perceive, feel, think or will. But if there did not exist, if there had not existed for æons, creatures more or less similar around us, if the universe had cared to produce only isolated higher individuals, or Super-Men, would there have been a need for such a complex form of life ; a need for reactions, so intricate and so subordinate to one another ; a need for perception, will

or thought ; an opening, so to speak, for such super-fine moral manners ?

## IV

After the great Dragon, Duty, let us pass on to the consideration of what Nietzsche regards as the vilest of all small moral worms : Humility. The word "worm" is appropriate ; for Nietzsche derives its origin from the practical wisdom of rolling up and shamming death in order to avoid a second crushing. Granted, as is very possible, that such is its real genealogy, there comes the question, why Nature (for even Nietzsche has unwillingly to admit that there is Nature) should have preserved this particular ditch-begotten little virtue ? The answer is, simply, that Humility happens to afford an excellent corrective for a particular optical illusion to which the human being, Mensch or Über-Mensch, is condemned (with danger to his comfort and even his existence), by a trifling peculiarity of his constitution. I am alluding, of course, to the fact that we, all of us, happen to be enclosed in our own skin, and are therefore aware of our own existence in a more direct, intimate and forcible manner than of the existence of others. Those others, meanwhile, similarly enclosed, are afflicted by the selfsame unevenness of perception : the inside, namely, oneself, is thoroughly visible, audible, intelligible and imperative ; the outside, or not-oneseif, becomes an accessory or background, and tends perpetually to vanish altogether. The virtue or vice of Humility serves to reverse, in part, this natural, but by no means

objectively correct, perspective ; and thereby tends to diminish the wear and tear, nay, the sometimes fatal accidents, which it must otherwise occasion. The fact of being what house-agents call "self-containing," makes us, each and all, the most important thing we can conceive. Humility whispers that, on the contrary, we are very probably by far the most unimportant thing in all the universe, and thereby halves our natural pretensions to something nearer our objective bulk and power. In this manner it enables us to find room to stand in, to thread our way among those too-too solid ghosts, our fellow men, to exchange place, to move, to expand even—in short, to live. This is the service rendered by Humility, and this is why Humility has been fostered by the racial Will to Existence, by the great *demiurgus*, Life, who shuts his eyes to baseness of origin and primordial worm-wriggling ; Life, well aware that, if the haughty genealogist went far enough in his researches, he would find wrigglings of some kind, and animals less aristocratic than worms, in the first chapter of the most distinguished family histories.

The reason why Life can be less squeamish than Nietzsche, and yet, somehow, maintain a certain æsthetic dignity and have as grand an air as any Zarathustra brandishing his Will to Power, is that Life possesses the secret of great transmutations, transfigurations, of which Nietzsche gradually lost the very conception. After Humility, Compassion is, in his eyes, the vilest and most vicious of Christian virtues. Sickness, weakness, says Nietzsche, requires only one thing—to be cleared away. That depends,

common sense has answered for centuries, in fact for æons, how sick the sick, how weak the weak. It is the strength of the weak man, the healthiness of the organs still free from disease, to which Compassion addresses itself, and which, with help and time, effects survival and recovery. Nay, what we look upon as symptoms of disease, or as faintings and failings of weakness, are frequently, in the moral order as well as the bodily, adaptations to a difficult crisis, diminished claims, nay, even inverted instincts, fostered by the great Will to Existence. Take the "Imitation of Christ," that almost complete, perhaps because almost posthumous, manifesto of the millenarian and ascetic and self-humiliating sides of Christianity. To us, particularly to us when in health and prosperity, it may have a taste which is mawkish, a taste of physic, if not of poison; but for centuries it was, and in individual cases (till wisdom and gentleness invent a better compound) it still remains a pain-killer, a sleeping draught which has saved from death or from madness. Christianity as defined by Nietzsche—that is to say, Christianity in its most questionable and perishable aspect—constituted, after all, only one of the many *modus vivendi* which the race made for itself at various stages of its difficult existence: regimens of brutality and narrow-mindedness or of self-suppression and mystic stultification, Spartan, early Aryan, early Hebraic, Buddhist, Christian—all representing a mutilation or a narcotising of some one of the soul's possibilities; each of them furnishing, in its turn, a balance of desirable effects over effects undesirable or actually pernicious. Looked at dispassionately, there

is no grosser falsehood in the notion that the individual ego is necessarily sinful, than in the notion that the individual tribe or cast or race is necessarily impeccable ; nor is it more lop-sided to give unto others what would be best employed by oneself, than to take away from others what might best be employed by them. Indeed, one may ask oneself whether Tolstoi, let us say, is really less of a human being, if he is really more warped and maimed, more of a cripple and a monster than—well, than Nietzsche.

## V

Let us leave the ground of human duty and virtue, and pass on, "Beyond Good and Evil," to that which Nietzsche considered the only real one : the ground of human greatness. What did Nietzsche make of the Human Work ? The *work*, which is the test and the reason of Carlyle's Hero and of Renan's Prospero-Sage, had no intrinsic interest in Nietzsche's eyes, no place in his philosophy. Its importance for him was merely as an expression of what he very erroneously took it to be, the outcome of an individual temperament, the manifestation of a Will to Power. Now, Nietzsche did not really want any Will to Power except his own, and he had a positively morbid dislike to coming in contact with other people's temperament. It is understating the case to say that nineteen out of every twenty references he makes to the work of other men are expressions of aversion, contempt or disgust : and it is no mere coincidence that his ideal, Zarathustra, in all we are told about his life, preaches,

reviles, laughs, dances, nay, even lets himself once or twice be lured into the deadly sin of pity, but on no single occasion extracts pleasure or profit from any other human being or any human being's work. The assimilation of other men's greatness, the enriching oneself by appreciation, is never mentioned as part of the processes of growth of the great man, of the Super-Man. His relations, when not of scorn and destruction, are entirely confined to his own solitary person ; he develops merely by wrestling with himself and by expressing himself ; he remains (even if multiplied to a possible race of Super-Men) not merely isolated and solitary, but virtually alone in the universe ; a colossal Michelangelesque figure, with immense sinews and rather academic draperies, filling up a narrow background entirely devoid of vegetation, houses, or any incident except two or three symbolical animals ; he stands or, as Nietzsche represents him, he dances, in a dignified manner though a dreary one ; and, when he is not inveighing against the sickening peculiarities of the human race he has turned his back upon, he is engaged in the one act for which he specially exists. The Super-Man says " ' Yes ' to life." But, before inquiring into the precise nature of this " ' Yes ' to life," let us forestall all possibility of its being mistaken for any kind of philosophic or poetical act of contemplation of life's loveliness or mystery. The more so that we shall incidentally gain some further, and some terribly significant, insight into the temperament with which Nietzsche himself had to face life. Here is his "genesis" of the *Vita Contemplativa* :



“In primitive times, the individual, conscious of his own strength, is busy translating his feelings and thoughts (*Vorstellungen*) into acts, as in hunting, robbing, aggression, ill-usage and murder, without counting such fainter imitations of such proceedings as he finds tolerated within his own community.” (Here I must open a parenthesis to remark upon the utter overlooking by Nietzsche of an activity which must necessarily have been enormously developed in primitive times, the activity of invention and manual dexterity.) “But if his vigour diminish,” proceeds Nietzsche in his account of the primæval man, “if he feel tired or sick or depressed or gluttoned, and therefore momentarily delivered of desire, then he becomes a comparatively better, that is to say, more harmless, creature. It is in this condition that he becomes a thinker and a reader of the future. But his thoughts, all the products of his mind, must necessarily reflect his momentary condition, that is to say, the beginning of cowardice and fatigue, the diminished importance in his feelings of activity and enjoyment.” Let us examine this statement. Nietzsche identifies, quite unwarrantably, the normal satisfaction of appetite with queasy and languid indigestion: according to him, the Berserker at rest must be the sick Berserker. Nietzsche has no recognition of the obvious fact that, in the healthy creature, the satisfaction of a want does not in the least mean the exhaustion of an energy (he sophistically or perhaps merely characteristically, *autobiographically*, identifies desire for objects with desire for action), and that, shelter, food, the first necessities once obtained, this energy will be at liberty, will go into other things,

useful inventions, mechanical work, and, those having given their result, into the superfluous pleasantness of play, art and thought. Nietzsche is even guilty of self-contradiction. He certainly seems to consider activity as due to a desire for asserting power ; yet he supposes activity to flag with the satisfaction of definite material wants. However this be, he entirely ignores the fact of the transmission to another employment of whatever energy is liberated by the cessation of a want, a fact which is at the root of human history, and explains all the successive complexities of human activity, bodily and mental. But having established the origin of the *Vita Contemplativa*, of thought, imagination, all the higher powers, in the slackness and nausea of the savage weary of violence and sick with surfeit, "*Pudenda origo!*" he has the audacity to exclaim at his own libellous account ! Having done this, he continues his attack on the life of the spirit by asserting that men of genius poison normal life by their demand for exceptional moments. "In the same manner," he says, "as we see savages exterminating themselves by the use of alcohol, so mankind, as a whole and in its more important qualities (*im ganzen und grossen*) has been slowly but thoroughly corrupted by the spiritual alcoholics of intoxicating feelings, and by the craving therefor. Who knows ? Perhaps mankind will even be exterminated thereby."

Thought, sympathetic perception, inventive calculation, imaginative and æsthetic joy, all that spiritual activity which enriches life, enabling it to bring forth more, demanding less weariness and waste, substituting enjoyment which can be shared for enjoyment which

must be fought for—all this an alcoholic unfitting mankind to live ! Alas, alas ! How deep must be the disease which thus converts his fellow-creature's best food into mere poison for this wretched Nietzsche's nerves ! "*Pudenda origo!*" one may, indeed, exclaim, not of the spiritual life, but of this man's view of it. We can now understand what Nietzsche's "saying 'Yes' to life" implies, and how it comes to be the culmination of a creed whose basis, as Nietzsche has told us, is "a certain pleasure in saying 'No.'"

## VI

According to Nietzsche's belief, under the rubric of the "Eternal Return," every item and every concatenation of items of the universe's existence is bound to repeat itself in cycles of absolutely precise similarity. By this doctrine, therefore, Nietzsche is enabled (however unconsciously) to withdraw the one ideal and the one consolation which he had apparently conceded to the weakness of all philosophers : the Super-Man and his "Yes" will indeed come, have indeed come, an infinity of times and already ; but the Super-Man and his "Yes" also pass, have passed, must pass, and be succeeded by a *Da Capo*, eternal like his comings and goings, of everything that is not Super-Man and not " 'Yes' to life." This cosmic fact, as Nietzsche affects to consider it, implies necessarily a return of all those things which the Super-Man appeared to have cleared away ; indeed, the eight days' illness which the discovery of the Eternal Return cost

Zarathustra is very clearly referred to that almost Super-Man's recognition of the return—ininitely repeated—of the meanness of spirit, the sympathy and desire for sympathy, the pity and humility, all the slave's-morality of that plebeian civilisation which offended the aristocratic Nietzsche by its stuffiness and evil smell. And it is this next to intolerable fact, it is this revolting habit on the part of "Life," to which, above all else, the famous "Yes" of the Super-Man is to be addressed with singing and dancing. The "'Yes' to life," therefore, implies, quite consonantly with all we know of Nietzsche's tendencies, a "No" not merely to all human hope and consolation, but a violent "No" to the assenting Super-Man's preferences and wishes. In fact, by an unexpected turn, we find that the "tendency to say 'No,'" the "deliberate ruthlessness" which Nietzsche had attributed to the original thinker, has presented us, at the hands of the denouncer of all asceticism and pessimism, with but a new variety of the doctrine of renunciation.

"Not merely," says Nietzsche, "to endure the inevitable, still less to ~~hide~~ it from ourselves . . . *but to love it.*" The thought has never, perhaps, been put in a more striking form; but the thought is old, and it has seen an enormous amount of service, because it has been on occasions, a very consoling one. It runs through all Stoical literature, descending from the strained but magnificent reasonableness of Epictetus and Aurelius down to a denial of evil, like that of American Faith-Healers; it takes another form, but remains essentially the same, in the Christian notion of Providence and Resignation, in all the paraphrases of

Dante's "*In la sua voluntade è nostra pace*;" it reappears as Goethe's "*Entbehren sollst du*," and has even quite recently been dished up, a judicious mixture of Pagan and Christian, by that exquisite concocter of not very fresh moral and poetic dainties, M. Maeterlinck. And the ubiquitousness, the tenacity, of this doctrine is surely explicable by its belonging, most probably, to a category for which Ibsen has coined a name, to its being, although in the highest and most philosophical sense, a "vital lie"; one of those human inventions for making life's occasional difficulties seem easier: a drug, a tonic, a stimulant or a sedative; not by any means a poison, but very far from being wholesome daily bread. Every form of the doctrine of renunciation, of saying "Yes" to that which naturally provokes a "No," has undoubtedly done great service, and still must do, to mankind; making the human being, if not more fruitful, at all events (upon the whole) less weedy, less parasitic and, in so far, less wasteful of his neighbour's time and his neighbour's strength. But it seems to have the drawback of every lie, even of vital lies, the drawback, cruelly, of not corresponding with facts. The facts are that combinations do occur which are dangerous to human life and power, and that pain and the revolt against pain have evolved themselves because they diminish the frequency of such evil combinations.

Sensitiveness to pain and abhorrence thereof are necessary; and, if they require occasional overcoming, it is merely to guard against some greater or more universal evil. It is right, therefore, despite Nietzsche, that there should be pity for others; and right, even

more, despite the Stoics, that there should be pity for ourselves. In the real "‘Yes’ to life" (not Zarathustra’s sham one) there must even be implied a "No," instinctive, passionate, even more than reasoned, against such of life’s items as are hostile to its completeness and duration.

By all means, therefore, let us play a game of skill and patience with Destiny ; turn Fate’s moves into gains when we can, and learn from our losses to play better in the future. But let us guard against the temptation, subtle and strong to our inertness and to our vanity, of thinking, or pretending to think, that we always gain. Making the best of things is intelligent and dignified, it is, above all, practical ; but beyond this begins the uncouth folly of depreciating advantages which we must forego or denying reverses which we have to sustain. To say systematically "Yes" to the evils of life would not only break the fruitful continuity of similarity and sympathy, but mar the individual’s energy, and jumble the individual’s instincts. It would be a poor beginning for a Super-Man to start with sensibilities so complacent, or illusions so complete, that other men’s poison should become his natural meat ; and it would condemn him, in the long run, to receive of the life he thus stupidly accepted only the poisonous refuse. ’Tis a poor result of moralising to affirm that black is white, loss no loss, suffering no suffering ; one feels it in all Stoicism from Epictetus down to Maeterlinck, and in all religious mysticism which insists on the goodness of a humanly good God. And if, following Nietzsche’s example, we lay ruthlessly analytic hands upon the latest expres-

sion of this venerable and indisputable piece of conventional morality, we shall find in the Zarathustrian precept, of "not merely enduring, but loving the inevitable," something worse than the mere weakness and insincerity which are at the bottom of all the other embodiments of this particular "vital lie." For, as the really difficult attitude towards life would be the simple, straightforward one of seeing it lucidly and feeling normally towards it, of hating its evil in proportion as we cherish its good, of continuing in our consciousness the great work of selection with a resolute "No" as well as a resolute "Yes"; as this would evidently be the attitude requiring perhaps almost superhuman strength and displaying almost superhuman dignity, there comes to be an element of positive vulgarity in the swagger of Zarathustra, shouting his "Yes" to the eternally recurring cycle of the universe's intolerable evils. Nay, worse than this; is there not in these Zarathustrian antics of "laughter and dancing" in the face of the most desolating of all nightmare conceptions of the universe, and in this ugly misapplication of the high and happy word "love" to the object of hatred, is there not in all this famous "Yes," a virtual "No" to everything natural, sane in spirit, nay, healthy in body?

## VII

Can this be the great gift for which Nietzsche is evermore preparing us? Is it in favour of this that we are told to destroy all long-established systems and

valuations? for this that we are to purify the world and our souls by ruthlessness, by "deliberate cruelty" towards others and ourselves? for this that the hills are to be levelled and the valleys raised up by methods not of engineering but of earthquake? Not in reality. For, more than in any other philosopher, we become aware that there is in Nietzsche's mind something round which his system has grown, but which is far more essential and vital to him than his system: something continually alluded to, constantly immanent, round which he perpetually hovers, into which he frequently plunges, on whose bank he erects metaphysical edifices, lets off fireworks of epigrams, sets holocausts ablaze and sings magnificent dithyrambs; but which remains undefined, a vague *It*. Such an ineffable central mystery exists in the thought of many philosophers, and perhaps of all mystics (for Nietzsche is a mystic); a whirlpool explaining everything, but never itself explained; called, as the case may be, "Higher Law," "Truth," "Good," sometimes merely "Nature," and, in the remoter Past, most frequently called by the name of "God." It is one of Nietzsche's finest and profoundest achievements that he has, once or twice, called this transcending *It* by a new, surprising and, methinks, a correct name, "My Taste."

In Nietzsche's case, indeed, more perhaps than in that of any other philosopher, the living nucleus of all his teaching is not a thought, but an emotional condition, organic and permanent. Under all the arguments which have grown out of it, under all the facts and theories attracted to it like iron filings to a magnet, out of the refuse of old and the mess of new doctrines,



there is, if we look carefully enough, a chronic irritation and throbbing : "I dislike," "I hate," "I am made uncomfortable," "I am incompatible," "I want to get rid," "I want to destroy," "I want to be alone," "I want room for my soreness and swelling." The hypertrophied, hypersensitive ego, which cannot endure the contact of life, the presence of others and other things ; the sick ego, in its feverish shiftings and feverish all-overishness, capable of convulsive efforts passing the powers of health, incapable at the same time of the most normal and every-day endurance ; such is, I think, the living core of Nietzsche's doctrines. And the various transcending messages he feels that he must bring, the great efforts of destruction and reconstruction he must accomplish, everything in short which he feels to be superhuman in himself, and merely the delusive birth-throes, they are the massive, yet pervading pain of a soul which distorts and magnifies all things to the measure of its discomfort. We have seen how his "Will to Power," remaining consciously such, fails to metamorphose itself into those desires for the not-ego, into that striving after the external-to-onself, into that thinking and feeling of the outside world, which is the process of exteriorisation of the subject into the object, normal and necessary in every healthy soul. We have seen similarly how, despite his extraordinary genius, the vastness of the universe and its complexity and vigour of life entirely escaped Nietzsche, until the world shrank to being little more for him than an inert, almost counterfeit, stage filled up by his own imaginary size and strength ; the co-operation of every kind of existence, the give and take

of past and present, the ceaseless act of assimilation and reproduction, and their culmination in the immortally living human work, all this accessory, organic, endless and endless complex activity becoming replaced in his mind by the puny deed of volition of a mere individual Super-Man. Nay, we have seen how he gravely asserted that this microscopic human detail could actually accept with a pompous "Yes" the inevitable course of life universal, of which he, his thought and volition, are but as the minutest bubble of froth; and we have seen also how this supposed "Yes" to life is in reality, and more than in any of the old ascetic doctrines, a "No" to the most strongly organised preferences and repulsions of the normal soul.

For Nietzsche, through the purely intellectual and often inherited parts of whose work we can trace the thread of that autobiographical philosophy he so greatly prized, gave with unerring truth the formula of his temperament. "A pleasure in saying 'No,' a certain deliberate ruthlessness." The "No," a "No" of his whole unhappy organism, exists not merely in this element of destructiveness; but even more subtly and characteristically in that sense of almost bodily disgust (*Ekel*) which the contact of his fellow-men, of their thoughts and feelings, arouses in him, with significant metaphors of "lack of air" and "filthy smell." Even more than that titillation of tearing and breaking perpetually in Nietzsche's fingers, there is the unmistakable evidence of disease in this constant spiritual nausea in Nietzsche's mouth. The two together mean that this man, so splendidly endowed

*in intellect, was so unhappily constituted as to receive mainly painful impressions from the totality of his surroundings. I think I am justified in saying "mainly painful impressions," despite the occasional praise which Nietzsche bestows upon classic literature, remote Alpine fastnesses, southern clearness and radiance, and more particularly upon certain music — Bizet's, especially, and (partly from contradictoriness to the Wagnerians) Mozart's. For such evidences of pleasure from outer things are not only rare, but they are never fused into any kind of pervading mood of gladness, of appreciation and gratitude towards the outer world. He has, indeed, put into words his incapacity of feeling anything save the fewest and most far-between impressions of the goodness of things, and expressed the mass of discontented, depreciating self-assertion in which these rare appreciative impressions were set. For such is the meaning, as indicative of Nietzsche's personality, of that famous phrase about the glance of the true philosopher, "which rarely admires, rarely looks up, rarely loves."*

Let us think what that means; and, particularly, what is contained in that boast of rarely loving. And in this last item, especially, the secret of Nietzsche's nature is out. One guesses it many times, but perhaps nowhere in his works is it so strongly suggested as in a certain beautiful chapter of "Zarathustra." He shows himself in it surrounded by all the beauty of life, all the tenderness of life, and by the majestic fact of life's eternal renovation; and he shows himself, at the same time, without the smallest thrill of emotional recognition, without the faintest sense of

being a part of it, without the faintest longing to merge himself therein, to take it in, to give himself to it, without a trace of the universal instinct to assimilate, to be renovated, to add to it in one's turn. He shows himself separate, unmoved, impervious, unaltered, solitary, sterile. The reason why Nietzsche will always remain inferior to other thinkers, from Plato and Lucretius to Spinoza and Schopenhauer, is that, for all his talk of "loving the inevitable," the man has no experience of the fact of love. I do not speak of love of human beings. Not to know that is certainly a lack and limitation, but there are lacks and limitations far deeper and graver still than that: not to unite in thought and feeling with the thought and feeling of which the world is full; not to appreciate, not to admire, not to reverence; not to unite in joy with what is lovely, in reverence with what, in man and nature, is powerful; nay, not to unite in the fruitful struggle of hatred with what is hateful.

But Nietzsche's Super-Man was to say "Yes" to the whole of life, "to love the inevitable"—that which, as he himself explained, most human beings could scarcely endure. He was to love rarely; or more correctly speaking—for those who have the power of loving must needs love whenever there is occasion, and the occasion is not rare, but common—he was not to love, in the word's real sense, at all.

Haunted, hag-ridden, by the sense of his own sore and struggling ego, Nietzsche, true to the autobiographical instincts which he discovered in all philosophic systematising, made life synonymous with that ego's realisation and assertion. "Give," he wrote in one of

his latest and finest works, "Give me, ye Gods, give me madness! madness to make me believe at last in myself." But in this world of intuitive and imitative action, of reflex-like instincts implanted inextricably deep below consciousness, there is no need for special self-belief or self-assertion; or, rather, self-belief and self-assertion are bound to exist, to push, to act, to speak, everywhere and in everything, whether they be conscious or not: they are implicit in every desire and every energy. The realisation of one's own ego is—even when it is not the fly's self-realisation on the coach wheel—the most unnecessary epiphenomenon; nay, the least fruitful exercise of an idle dilettanteism. Believe in oneself! Why is it not enough that we believe in the objects of our love and our hate, in the aims of our impulses and actions? And does life depend upon the fiat of individual self-realisation? What is this childish trifling about saying "'Yes' to life," about loving the inevitable? Man, the inevitable can do without your approval! And Life has you safe in its clutches, Life, Death—and the madness you invoked, also.

## VIII

Why have we spent so much time—which would have sufficed to collect a volume of sane and useful sayings out of Nietzsche's work—upon the analysis of his unhappy, morbid and sterile personality? Partly because, in the universal and necessary reconsideration of all our previous habits of belief and standards of conduct, the imitation of Nietzsche's attitude con-

stitutes a real, though a momentary, danger to some of us. But partly, also, because the attitude of Nietzsche suggests in its main characteristics, and helps us to construct even in some of its details, an attitude towards the universe of an exactly contrary nature. In analysing the sham "Yes" which this passionate No-Sayer flung in the face of the life he had stripped of all living quality, we may have been led to conceive a more genuine "Yes" addressed to a more real life. And thus we may have come to reverse the prayer of Nietzsche, and to exclaim, in humility and confidence : "Give us, ye Gods, Sanity : so that we may believe in all which is not merely our own self."



PROFESSOR JAMES AND THE “WILL  
TO BELIEVE”





## PROFESSOR JAMES AND THE "WILL TO BELIEVE"

### I

THE *need* to believe. That is the title which, in my mind, I find I give to these subtle, brilliant, delicate, violent, and altogether delightful and intolerable essays of Professor William James. The "*will to believe*," he himself has entitled them and the main subject they treat of: as a lesser apologist, some years ago, had called a similar book the "*Wish to Believe*."

The *wish*, the *will* to believe—suggestive enough titles certainly. But, if I may paraphrase Faust's commentary on St. John: in the beginning, before the *wish*, or the *will*, there was something else; in the beginning was the *need*. The *need to believe*—that is to say, a given mental constitution, typical like all others, whose spontaneous and inevitable tendencies have been reinforced by such portion of its surroundings as it found akin to itself. But, at that rate, what about truth—abstract truth? Surely we all of us want to get at that. Of course we ~~all~~ do, and each of us more than every one else. But abstract truth has to

be sought for by methods, to be sought for, moreover, in one direction or another ; and these methods and this direction depend, in things spiritual more particularly, upon our intimate constitutional habits, and represent that need to believe, or not to believe, one sort of thing rather than another ; the *need* which, as remarked, must come before the *wish* or the *will*. This is prejudging the question. Yes ; but prejudging it equitably. For, while postulating on the part of Professor James a constitutional need to believe, of which his arguments are mere explanations and excuses, I admit from the first that a corresponding *need not to believe* (that is, not to believe the same as Professor James), and even a *will* not to believe, is at the bottom of the counter-arguments with which I shall endeavour to oppose him. Indeed, the whole small usefulness of the following notes depends, in my eyes, on their embodying a picture of the type of *mind which does not need to believe*, to set opposite Professor James's incidentally drawn portrait of *the mind which does need to believe* ; and this for the benefit of that unbiassed abstract reader who exists only in the average (and perhaps not even there), and for the better setting forth of what I hold to be a great and consolatory fact, to wit, that there are luckily a great variety of human types, and a good many ways of working out one's spiritual welfare, of being saved in life, if not after death.

This being the case, and Professor James's arguments seeming to me only modernised versions of what has been alleged ever since the beginning of such controversies, I need make no excuses for the venerable

staleness of my counter-arguments. For when, as in this particular case, it is a great Goliath of Science who comes forward with newly furbished weapons from the old orthodox armoury, it is no disgrace to the poor David of Ignorance to fill his sling, not with smooth pebbles from the brook, but with a handful of rusty rationalistic shot.

## II

There enters, according to Professor James's title (and I am not, I hope, misunderstanding him in saying according also to Professor James's ideas), something into belief besides the evidence and the logical process of which, according to old-fashioned notions, belief was exclusively composed. Or rather, belief is the outcome of something which our dogmatising fathers who believed exclusively in the intellect (because they denied that their adversaries had any) allowed only as an ingredient and factor of variation in error. A kindlier disposition towards our opponents, and a more rigorous scrutiny of our own mental processes, has led us moderns to perceive that logical proof and ocular demonstration are not much more than negative powers, and that a stronger motor than they is needed to set a-going the lazy and much impeded mechanism of human belief. This is one of the great achievements of modern mental science; and its convincing elucidation is one of the finest successes of Professor James's own splendid work in Psychology.

*Belief* in the existence of anything is primarily set afoot by a practical or emotional requirement; and it

is only far, far on in intellectual development (and even there only pushed by pleasurable impulses to ransack facts or construct theories) that we meet with ideas, with beliefs, existing for their own sake and born solely of other ones. But primarily, as I said, we believe in a thing because we feel in some way that tends towards it : we set about looking for water not because certain aspects of the place afford an intellectual persuasion of its presence, but because we want to drink it ; and the intellectual element of evidence and logic (disregarded so long as we are not thirsty) comes in only to direct or to check this incipient belief, this conception produced by desire. The psychological theory of belief was formulated centuries ago (though not by a philosopher), in the adage about wishes being horses. In the earlier stage belief is indistinguishable from expectation, and expectation (as we know from infants' proceedings about food and grown-up people's views about the duties of others) is merely a *conceptional wish*, frequently not merely independent of reality, but absolutely hostile to it. This is the first stage. The beggars of the old adage raise their foot into the stirrup, and up ! but alas, no horses are there to bestride ! The child eagerly bites into a sweet, delicious orange, and (forgive my vulgarity) spits out a very sour lemon. We all of us go to our neighbour clamouring for sympathy and assistance, and find that our neighbour takes a different view, and has his own affairs to look after. The result of such experience, of the beggar's attempt to ride, is a modification of the belief which is a kind of desire into the more complex sort of belief which, as often as not,

runs counter thereunto. The experience, being usually disagreeable, is supplemented or replaced, by what we call logic, which dispenses us from biting into fruit which may be sour, clamouring for sympathy which may be refused, and generally, like those beggars, getting a bad fall off imaginary horses. Experience and logic, at any rate, modify our conceptions; and such modified conceptions are what we mean when, in any scientific or practical way, we speak of *belief*. Moreover, it is such belief as this upon which, from a wholesome fear of accidents, we usually try to base our actions. In this manner does impulse—the impulse, if we may call it so, of prudence—stimulate our lazy minds and, inducing us to modify our expectations by knowledge, counteract the previous impulse to believe in the existence of everything we want.

Such is the platitudinous history of the formation of belief, in those practical matters where certainty is necessary and attainable. Now this alteration of expectation by actuality, this rude elimination of the element of mere personal desire out of what we call belief, does most conspicuously *not* take place in one of belief's chief categories, and (by a curious coincidence) in the very category which has usurped the name without further qualifications. In matters religious and philosophical (which are so largely the same under different titles), wishes really do become horses; at all events, every beggar contrives to enjoy a ride, whether on Pegasus or a stickhorse only he himself is left to judge. We are all of us, either individually or grouped into creeds and schools, allowed in such

matters as God, the Soul, Immortality, and all the transcendent questions, to express our preferences and our requirements as we should never dare express them in physics or chemistry, or the most rudimentary housewife's science. It is no exaggeration to say that we could not boil an egg without a severe elimination of the personal element of consideration of *wish* and *will*, and *needs of our nature*—such as is never applied to religious and philosophical beliefs. This difference shows, as apologists have often remarked, that belief in things spiritual conforms to different rules from belief in things temporal. And therein I agree completely. But if religious thought can thus dispense with the kind of certainty required even for the simplest practical affairs, this must surely be only because no practical decisions are really based upon it; because it is not a means to an end, but an end, even like art, in itself. The persistence in all views on spiritual matters, of that element of desire, nay, of every individual and momentary feeling which has been eliminated from more material kinds of belief, shows that such views are useful not as a basis for action, but as an expression and embodiment of emotional and constructive impulses inherent in what we may call the soul. Such a view is no disparagement to religion; if anything, the contrary. There are activities, surely, which, instead of merely *stoking*, so to speak, for the maintenance of themselves and of other activities, are advantageous to life by increasing and regulating its complexities; nay, which perhaps constitute, in the eyes of a rational human being, life's only worthy end and object. To despise such activities is the equivalent,

on the psychologist's part, of a certain kind of political economy, preaching abstinence from all the good which wealth can buy for the sake of increasing that wealth itself, which, apart from its use, can have no meaning.

If, therefore, *will* can enter into belief, it is only, to my mind, as an expression of *need*, of the craving of this part of our constitution. And in so far as the needs of different men differ, and the needs of different historical periods and racial types differ still more, it is not surprising that while science and the practical applications thereof have tended to that ever greater unity which we associate with the notion of objective truth, the creations of the religious instinct, the expressions of the will not to *know*, nor to *succeed*, but to *believe*, have been as various as the product of the æsthetic faculties.

I am not speaking disrespectfully of religious thought, in saying that it is far less akin to science than to art, indeed, in its highest manifestation, perhaps merely a category of the æsthetic phenomenon ; for as I do not agree with Professor James that the æsthetic sensibility is an accident in evolution like the capacity for sea-sickness, I am not bound (although I have no *will to believe*) to agree with another, non-unitarian psychologist, that "religion is a malady of the soul."

Indeed, when I come to think of it, it seems as if I had more sympathy with religious people instead of less, just because I disbelieve in religion's objective validity or value : at all events, my sympathies are less restricted than those of the various religious persons themselves, High Church, Low Church, Anglican, Roman, follower of Ali and follower of Omar, nay even



(I fear) of Professor James himself, who lays about him freely against the excessive demands of Catholics and Calvinists, the insufficient demands of agnostics—in fact against everybody who is not of his own way of thinking. If desire, suitability to one's own feelings (which I take to be the meaning of "moral coherence"), enters into religious belief; why then there must enter into it the temperamental peculiarities and the peculiarities of civilisation by which these non-logical demands are differentiated from each other; and if truth is to result from it all, why insist that only one view can be true—or rather, why not insist that to himself each single individual must necessarily be in the right? Once admit a *will to believe*, and the divergences between, say, the God of the Hebrews (Patriarchs and Prophets indiscriminately) and the God of Marcus Aurelius, and the God of Dante, and the God of Emerson, must be as legitimate and as significant of truth as the coincidences between them. Neither should Professor James warn us against going into excessive detail about the Divinity and admonish us to be satisfied, so to speak, with the Divinity being there at all. Professor James, indeed, is satisfied with God being there, and perhaps being there to satisfy Professor James; but that would not at all suffice for Dante, who wanted a God to apply filthy chastisements for sins he "did not feel inclined to"; nor for Cardinal Newman, who wanted a God to set afoot a world capable of Original Sin and Redemption; nor for the poor old woman who wants a God able to take pleasure in a twopenny taper.

And why should we sympathise less with all these

divergent religious needs than with those of Professor William James? Only, because we happen to be nearer his general way of thinking, because we happen to admire him enormously, while we are indifferent to the Eternal Punishment of Gluttons (as set forth by Dante), to Original Sin (as understood by Newman), and to cheap wax lights (as regarded by the devout old lady). And here let me say that, unless we consider all religions as equally a nuisance (and perhaps even if we do so consider them), it would surely be more consistent, kinder, and therefore better bred, more wholesome for our own spiritual life, such as it may be, if we could get to speak and even think respectfully of the sincere and disinterested elements in every kind of belief. Agnosticism can afford to be fairer to Romanism than Protestants can be, fairer to Calvinism than it is possible for Ritualists, more decent to each and every honest and beautiful faith than any other honest and beautiful faith is wont to be. I may claim even more for the attitude towards various religious faiths of those who can dispense with any, for the thorough-paced agnostic. Since, should there really exist, immanent and hidden in this world of phenomena, of humanly perceived and interpreted appearances, an *Ens Realissimum* in any way resembling the creatures who worship and burn, turn about, the images they have made of him, if there be such an One—is it not justifiable to suppose that, having created such various moral soils and climates and germs, the unknown First Cause might love to watch the different growths of soul, and cherish the diversity of his spiritual garden?

## III

But these are the scruples of a determinist, whose individual fate it is to have no *will to believe* the same things as Professor James.

He, on the other hand, *who does will to believe*, has rather a complicated arrangement to make, which, to the best of my power, I desire to understand and put before the reader fairly. There is—such is the pith of the arguments—there is of course a non-rational element existing quite legitimately in belief: the individual believer has an individual constitution, and this has got individual *needs*, tendencies, impulses, repulsions, desires. But—and in this *but* is the whole morality and philosophy of the business—but these constitutional, hence inevitable, fatal needs, are only reasons among which the will chooses. And the will, which makes the choice, is overruled, determined by none of these inevitable motives, is independent of the individual constitution; it promenades its glance, poising freely *in vacuo*, upon the whole series of inevitable tendencies; and it makes its choice *freely*. Hence it would seem that, so far from the *Will to believe* being, as I have represented it, a *Need to believe*; the Will to Believe can exist even where there is a constitutional need not to believe. And by this arrangement we are all responsible for our beliefs, since we are responsible for our wills—or is it our wills which are responsible for us?—and there is no reason on earth for being polite towards bigotry or scepticism, seeing that Cardinal Newman, M. Renan, Professor

Clifford, and especially Hegel, were perfectly free to think differently from the remarkably reprehensible way in which they did.

There is, therefore, a clear space round the will. It sits somewhere in the midst of motives, seeing them plainly, but quite safe from their laying hands on it. This would be a curious position—though it has not seemed an impossible one to most persons—for the Will to enjoy, or rather for the myriads of Wills all poised *in vacuo* like a spider in the midst of a web which shouldn't touch him. But the situation becomes quite different, and the position of the will far less conspicuous, if we admit with Professor James that there is no real reason for conceiving the isolated wills as surrounded by anything continuous in itself; there are holes round the wills because there are holes here, there, and everywhere. The universe is no longer homogeneous in necessity of action and reaction; the universe is honeycombed, nay actually held in solution, by a foreign something called chance. Even in the most trivial matters, we may watch the movements of chance, and verify the absolute freedom of the human will. Listen to Professor James:

"Do not all the motives that assail us, all the futures that offer themselves to our choice, spring equally from the soil of the Past; and would not either one of them, whether realised through chance or through necessity, the moment it was realised, seem to us to fit that past, and in the completest and most continuous manner to interdigitate with the phenomenon already there." The Past, for instance, has led Professor James, as he tells us, to the possibility

of choosing to take one street rather than the other. He shows us two separate and possible universes, one in which he has chosen the one street, another in which he has chosen the other street ; and asks which of the two is the more rational universe, summing up the demonstration with the remark : "In every outwardly verifiable and practical respect, a world in which the alternatives that now actually distract your choice were decided by pure chance would be *by me* absolutely undistinguished from the world in which I now live." But that is just it. There seems a chance, an alternative, wherever we do not see with eyes or with experience the totality of a process. To me it seems pure chance that the omelette collapses, instead of swelling, for I do not see what should make it do either ; but my cook knows and blushes for her awkwardness. In watching an illness, even to a doctor, there may seem to be a chance, because the doctor does not know all that is going on. That a particular grain of sand should have made straight for Cromwell's vitals, with the result of killing him, seemed a matter of chance to Pascal, because it was ~~at~~ happening unseen in another man's body ; but had Pascal been experimenting in his study with grains of sand he would not have accepted chance as an explanation. *Chance* in fact is a name for the residuum, for what we do not know or do not care about, and in all speculations there must be, perpetually changing, such a residuum. *Chance* will come in wherever we cease to look or fail to see into a process. It indicates our ignorance not merely of what *will happen*, but of what *is happening*. There seems no sufficient reason, more-

over, why, if we admit chance as a condition in the act of willing, which is one of the most obscure and entangled mysteries of our nature, one which observation seems almost unable to arrive at—we should not admit chance also as a condition in the perfectly clear and well-known phenomena which lie under our eye. Why should chance not make the water in a boiler freeze? Yet, if such a thing occurred, we should merely jump, to the conclusion that some new factor of change had come in unnoticed by us; we might even say that some saint or fairy had been abroad, and that his preference had upset the ways of the elements. But we should not invoke *chance*. Indeed, in my ignorance of science I have an idea (perhaps mistaken) that scientific experiments are sometimes made, medical diagnosis for instance, on the express *exclusion of chance*: a substance put into something, a mixture made inside a pot or inside a human being, and, according to the results given by the new element, some conclusion drawn about the previous contents of pot or human being. But I am ignorant of science, and may be mistaken; so I will only draw on literature for confirmation, and remark that it seems odd that even Pope should have refused chance a place in the material universe and relegated it to the secret operations of what were called the faculties of the mind:

"And binding Nature fast in Fate,  
Left free the Human Will."

.

This snipping of the web of cause and effect, this bringing in of independent factors from the back of

beyond, is perhaps a necessary conclusion from the facts and tendencies of recent science ; of this I am too ignorant to judge. Connected with the *will to believe*, it seems to me (what such a will to believe surely authorises) a voluntary result of the old, old theological dilemma of squaring omnipotence and moral perfection. For, if God is the first cause, God is the only cause, and the primary cause of every secondary and successive cause whatsoever. If God made man, and man made mischief, then primarily that mischief was of God's making. Nor would there have been anything at all shocking in this, if the world had contained only metaphysicians, and religion had ministered only to a logical and constructive desire for a beginning of all things.

But the world was peopled also with persons liable to molest their neighbours, and with other persons thus molested ; and religion was also required to sanction, by a system of prohibitions, of rewards and of punishment, the practically indispensable craving for justice. For, by a very natural contradiction, mankind has always acted as if the individual will were free enough to be responsible, but determinable enough to be influenced by threats and promises. Now it would never have done (as has been formulated by M. Paul Bourget's determinist villain) for men to answer the judging divinity by pointing out that he was responsible for the very acts he was about to punish. "Ihr lasst den Armen schuldig werden"—at all events, such views were safe only in philosophical novels, like *Job* and *Wilhelm Meister*.

Moreover, besides the practical dangers which such

a view as this might have entailed, there was the emotional distress it must bring to another class of persons, who asked of religion not the solution of a metaphysical riddle, nor the sanction of an ethical policy, but something perhaps more indispensable than either, an embodied maximum of sympathy, of helpfulness, of lovingkindness, of all the beautiful qualities which mankind showed only in the sample. Some such dilemma there must have been in every religion which was more than mere nature worship or less than pure metaphysics; and it would be interesting could one study the various modes of eluding it. The best plan was clearly to isolate, to prevent the clashing, of conceptions of the divinity so originally incongruous as the Metaphysical First Cause, the Ethical Judge, and the emotional Lover of the Soul. Christianity effected this by the miraculous intervention of human free will and disobedience. The miracle was, indeed, far from satisfactory: man's will, separated, in order to be completely responsible, from all the rest of causation, was not logically controllable by a categorical imperative, since an imperative, an order, an enforcement, is inconceivable towards a will which is not conditioned; and on the other hand the very freedom of man's will must have been granted by a First Cause who, if omnipotent, could have chosen to obviate so terrible a danger. The solidarity between God and Evil still existed, the responsibility for Man's and Nature's wickedness had been merely concealed; suspicion, nay certainty of this, growled through every possible form of disbelief and heresy. But the solidarity had been reduced to a minimum, the responsibility had been



relegated to an infinitely distant Past, and the church, luckily perhaps for mankind, decided that any difficulty there might remain in the matter was silenced by the inscrutability of God's ways to man. Thus things were pacified by the doctrine of Original Sin, which to the rigorously logical mind of Newman seemed "almost as certain as that the world exists and as the existence of God."

In this way it became possible for every man to cherish a personal divinity, by virtually breaking up the unity of the monotheistic idea. For in the individual conscience the total self-contradictory Godhead exists, most probably, only in short (and most often painful) flashes of synthesis; from which each individual nature selects and magnifies those aspects which answer to its deepest individual wants. A logical God there no doubt is, a perfectly consistent First Cause, in the thought of the metaphysician or theologian, untroubled by questions of sentiment or conduct. The whole Bible, on the other hand (save Job) and every other manifestation of Puritanism, past or present, testifies to the undisturbed subjective reign of a God of Righteousness, from whom all injustice, however logically demonstrable, has been passionately purged away. While, on the other hand, one of the most blessed sights in life are the glimpses we get of a Godhead, consubstantial with so many exquisite human hearts, in the perfection of whose godness all evil, in reality or in dogma, is dissolved and neutralised away. But the total and definite divinity, monstrous in absurd and wicked contradictions, can never have been clearly discerned without horror, and has in the practical

exercise of every creed been invariably broken up or hidden away. To say this is no disrespect, but quite the contrary, to the noble though discrepant instincts fortuitously meeting and clashing in what we have called religion. And, as regards, on the other hand, an objective primary Reality, let not anything I have said be construed into a grotesque judgment concerning the existence of such a One. If, as all philosophical progress unites in thinking, and as Kant has made it so easy for us all to grasp, if it is true that all that we know we can know only in the terms of our senses and our organic intellectual necessities, then must the Objective First Cause remain for ever hopelessly hidden from ~~our~~ knowledge and our imagination; and the God, whatsoever he be, whom we worship, we hope for or deny, be but an idol of our own making, an idol the more potent that he is a part of ourselves; but an idol in judging of whose qualities and whose possibilities we are only judging our own thoughts, and desires, and dreams; and the Objective Real Cause might, had he qualities or form, rebuke us as the Spirit of the Earth did Faust:—

“Du gleichst dem Geist den du begreifst, nicht Mir!”

#### IV

The cruxes of theology, and theology's ways of settling them are, as Mr. Richard Le Gallienne has shown in a small book which is suggestive and charming, for the most part only the dilemmas and ways

out of them of metaphysics. But the difference between the thinker bent upon religious edification, and the thinker of mere rationalistic habits, is that the latter is not forced to attempt anomalous unifications in the person of a divinity. Professor James has failed to see this great advantage of the Agnostic's intellectual and moral position ; and, being a Unitarian, he declines to hear of subjective divinities ; he *wills to believe* in an objective and substantive Godhead. By constructing an elaborate system of air-tight compartments filled with Freewill which are connected with, but not pressed upon by, surrounding causality, he has saved the unity of the Creator by sacrificing, very explicitly, the unity of Creation. And in so doing he erroneously imagines that he has attained the only morally endurable conception of the relations of man with what is not man. "If," writes Professor James of his opponent, the determinist, "if all he means is that the badness of some parts does not prevent his acceptance of a universe whose *other* parts give him satisfaction, I welcome him (it is always Professor James who speaks) as an ally. He (the determinist) has abandoned the notion of the *whole*, which is the essence of deterministic monism, and views things as a pluralism, just as I do in this paper."

Not by any means, Professor James ; I can, as a human being, take exception to any amount of things in the universe without in the least postulating a pluralism. The fact of various items being parts of the same whole, that is to say, being bound to act and react on one another, does not in the least imply that the action and reaction in question should be accom-

panied in any of them by the particular condition or feeling called pleasure or approval. Indeed, since pleasure and disapproval do undoubtedly exist, one might deduce from their existence the very fact that various items do act and react upon one another ; in other words that there is an unbroken chain of causation, a causal whole ; whereas, if the universe were full of gaps in the sequence, approval and disapproval would necessarily be by so far diminished. There is, therefore, no pluralistic view implied in the recognition that one tiny piece of the great whole, the portion calling itself *Man*, is so constituted, and constituted in virtue of the nature of the whole, as to feel, to judge the larger portion in which it is embedded, according to standards inevitably arising out of its special constitution and surroundings. In synthesising its piece of the universe according to its synthetic system, and dividing that piece of the universe into facts which delight and facts which revolt its special mode of being, mankind is so far from breaking up the total unity that its human synthesis and analysis, its repugnance and its preference, are themselves traceable to the action and reaction between itself and the adjacent parts, so to speak, of that whole ; actions and reactions due, no doubt, in their turn to the actions and reactions of infinite other parts which are hidden from the faculties which the whole has given to that part of itself called mankind, and given thus limited and determined.

The very essence of determinism is the belief that man's likings and dislikings, nay, his modalities of perception and reasoning, are due to the causal chain of processes which have constituted him, which do

constitute him man ; man, and not horse, dog, or cat ; man, and not tree or stone ; man, and not angel, Demiurgus, or God ; and that, so far as there is a difference in the determined constitution, in the determining sequence, man's likings and dislikings and feelings and thoughts are not shared by horse, dog, cat, tree, stone, angel, Demiurgus, or God.

Or God. Taking up, therefore, the idol we all make and alter and endow with that name, I may say that only thorough-paced determinism can, it seems to me, really break that wretched solidarity between the First Cause, postulated by man's reason, and the Principle of Good demanded by man's heart. For, how can we ask of a First Cause, which our reason insists on as absolutely unconditioned (else it would not be First Cause at all) participating in the moral instincts and preferences which are involved in the very nature of man? And how, on the other hand, can we, because our reason insists on the existence of a bare First Cause, and on the existence, moreover, of infinite realities necessarily hidden from our faculties, which perceive only what we call phenomena, why should we, how could we, silence those demands for justice, kindness, harmony, which are an inevitable part of our constitutions? We cannot help judging the Universe, we cannot help judging God, and finding both at fault. But, if we are reasonable, we cannot help at the same time recognising that the Universe and the God we are judging are mere creations of our own faculties ; that good and evil as we conceive it, or even good and evil at all, are qualities which exist for certain only relatively to mankind ; that it is only an exuberance of

an activity better turned to the criticism of ourselves, which makes us criticise also the creations—perhaps the utterly gratuitous creations—of our own human mind, makes us rage at the ugliness of the picture of our painting, and sorrow at the cruelty of the idol we have wrought. As to the great Realities, we cannot fall foul of them, since we cannot even conceive them. This is the reconciliation between our reason and our desires, which can console such of us as admit the merely subjective nature of what our religious instincts, harmonious or discordant in their action, are for ever making us hope and believe.

But the person who wills, or needs to believe, in an objective First Cause and in an objective intention in the universe (or in part of the universe), is liable to think that the morality of man receives its principal sanction from a similar morality on the part of God. To Professor James, it would seem, a disbelief in the second contradicts, or largely invalidates, a belief in the first. To me, on the contrary, it seems as if the recognition that we know only our own desires and fancies about the order of the universe, ought, rather, to make us give more implicit obedience to what is evidently the order, the necessity of man's nature. We find no trace—Professor James is the first to admit it—no trace of morality in the proceedings of physical nature; he might have added that we find distinct traces of what would be immorality for us in the proceedings of our very near animal relatives. What can this prove save that morality is a necessity, a law special to man; and what stronger sanction can morality obtain than the fact that it is specially neces-

sary for us? Suppose, by way of comparison, that we ask which is the more cogent reason for eating, or sleeping, or taking a walk, the fact that all our neighbours do as much, and that we are bound to them by similarity; or the fact that each of us, individually, cannot live comfortably without eating, or sleeping, or taking a walk? Surely the greater cogency is the nearer to ourselves. If it were otherwise, we should be bound to disregard the command, the necessity of our individual constitution, and imitate our neighbours not merely in the points in which there is unanimity of nature and interest, but also in the points in which there is discrepancy. Similarly between mankind and the universe. The moral imperative *is* an imperative because man's constitution and circumstances enforce it; it is an order which cannot be disobeyed, because it comes from within. Would the sanction be greater if the imperative applied also to the universe beyond man, if the order came from without? Were such the case, and did the cogency of an imperative depend upon the number and the variety of the classes which obeyed it; did solidarity with the non-human universe instead of solidarity inside mankind, and, moreover, inside the human individual constitution, determine our actions—then we should be bound to set at defiance all our human instincts of righteousness merely because we recognised that the universe, which is bigger than mankind, conformed to a standard which is not that of human rightdoing at all. So far as we can see, there is a different right and wrong, or perhaps no right and wrong at all, outside the human being and human society. Certain philosophers, and particularly

certain mystics, have seen this plainly, and settled the question in a strictly logical manner. Our moral instincts, they have justly perceived, although necessary to us and to this earthly existence, need have no use in an existence carried on on different lines. These instincts may therefore be merely temporary ; and, our spiritual essence once freed from bodily and social requirements, it is conceivable that we may shed such narrowing and distorting prejudices, and get to like those arrangements of the universe which we now call *evil*, quite as well as the others which we now call good ; or rather, we may give up such earthly provincialisms as approval and disapproval, and sit quite happily at the First Cause's right hand, perfectly satisfied with the mere knowledge of the chain of causality.

This is exceedingly logical. But it is not *moral*. Our instincts for good somehow refuse to be satisfied with the assurance that they are temporary and necessary hallucinations, and accordingly we find that such a solution of the great riddle does not content itself to Professor James any more than to that wholesome and practical, but rather rough and unscientific moralist, the Church, which has never omitted to burn the persons, or at least the books, of those who advanced this particular justification of God's ways to man. The Church and Professor James have felt very strongly that life would be unendurable without a maximum of moral feeling on man's part ; and that such a maximum



requires that man should blindly strive and cry out for morality, eternally and everywhere. Besides, a divinity is wanted, not merely to satisfy the logical and the emotional wants of mankind, but also to sanction, to enforce morality and, even more, to satisfy man's moral cravings. Hence a constant juggling with ideas, juggling whose efficacy depended on the extent to which mankind was able to close either the eye of morality or the eye of logic. Original Sin was one of the dodges which succeeded when the eye of morality was closed ; when the eye of reason, always a little short-sighted, was winked, it was possible to arrange matters by splitting the divine essence into a Father who did all the bad obscure business of creation, and a Son filling the centre of vision with the effulgence of self-sacrifice and redemption ; indeed, I cannot but think that the more rationalised Christianity of Professor James loses incalculably by the reduction to a minimum of the divinity of Christ. Be this as it may, the church through all the centuries, and Professor James through all his volume, have found themselves perpetually in presence of the old, old dilemma, not the dilemma of determinism with which Professor James has dealt explicitly, but the much worse, because implicit, dilemma of "justifying the Ways of God to Man."

## VI

Professor James's will to believe has taken him into the thick of it. For, not satisfied with breaking up the causal connexion of the Universe and filling up

the gaps with Free Will and Chance, he has felt the need of reinstating into this discontinuous and parti-coloured scheme of things a First Cause who shall satisfy the moral cravings of man.

According to a favourite theological habit, Professor James sees in these moral cravings an implied promise that they must be satisfied. Now, satisfaction is undoubtedly connected with demand. Only, a demand does not imply that its satisfaction is actually taking place, but rather the contrary. We suffer very keenly from the insufficient morality of the universe. This is a reason for our trying to increase it by our own efforts and in our own sphere ; it is not a reason for supposing that the very cause of our suffering is really trying to diminish our doing so. Why not believe at once that there must be a fire hidden somewhere in a room because we feel ourselves perishing with cold ? Let us make up a fire ourselves, and all will be set right.

Right for some persons, but evidently not for others. What they want is not to be warm, but to feel sure that the host who has (in their view) invited them to his house, has disliked the notion of their being cold. Any increase in Good which Man brings into things does not satisfy Man's desire that things should be good apart from him.

Hence another argument. No longer that we are mistaken in making such a fuss about good and evil, but rather, that the very fuss we make will, in some sort, oblige the First Cause to reveal how very, very much more good there is in the universe than we ever guessed. This argument is, like all the other

arguments (and my counter-arguments), as old as the hills. But Professor James has contrived to put it into a form most modern and most scientific, alas ! although to my mind not very cogent. Since, of all devices for putting me in conceit with a First Cause, the one least likely is that of representing the First Cause as a Vivisector. For it is upon the description of the agonies and the terror of a poor dog in the process, as Professor James consolingly puts it, of "performing a function incalculably higher than that which prosperous canine life admits of," that is based the argument in question : if mankind could only understand as much more of the universe and the purposes of the Creator as the physiologist's assistant understands of the uses of vivisection than the vivisected dog, then surely mankind might be expected (as the dog would be) to "religiously acquiesce" in being, so to speak, vivisected by the divinity. This argument has seen so much service in various theological forms, that it must evidently afford satisfaction to a large number of persons with a will to believe sufficient to overcome certain repugnances. But there are other persons to whom vivisection, even of dogs, is not a subject for "religious acquiescence" ; to whom the very wickedest imaginable act would be to hide from the creature thus immolated any reason which might justify, any good which might counterbalance, its unmitigated anguish. For if there are minds so constituted as to require deism for their moral well-being, even deism garnished with such analogies, there are certainly many others (and perhaps even among really pious believers) who either break loose from any deistic

creed, as from a species of Moloch worship, or remain within its pale, suffering frightful doubts or stultifying their reason, merely because they have got enslaved to the logical demand for some original cause of all things. Why has Omnipotence allowed us to develop moral instincts which necessarily condemn some of Omnipotence's conspicuous proceedings? Why given us reason enough to see only the evil, and withheld the extra amount which would have revealed the eventual good? Surely one-half of religiously-constituted men and women have suffered from this thought, whether expressed in symbols of original sin and redemption through innocent blood, or awakened quite unmetaphorically by the individual cruelties of Fate. For there are worse things to think of than even the Brockton murderer (to whom Professor James perhaps unnecessarily introduces us), and which stick more in one's throat, mine at least, than any human act of meanness and brutality. Cast your eye over the circle of your own acquaintance and you will understand what I mean : cases where two creatures are separated by death at the moment of a tardy, sighed-for union ; worse, cases where a creature, who has never had any gladness in life, sees its poor little candle of happiness snuffed out in a few months, or weeks, with the life of a wife or husband ; cases where we are abashed at the bare thought of offering condolence, and which exist at every moment and in every street. Is the thought of such things as these made more supportable by the belief that the Creator might have made them seem less bad if only he had cared ?

To such of us as feel in this manner, a universe

whence the First Cause has been banished, like the gods of Lucretius, seems a thing almost too good to be true. And some of us, assuredly, have felt a new lease of moral life accompanying the gradual or sudden recognition that all we know of good and of evil is confined to man ; that we are spiritually akin only to our own kind ; and that the ambiguous divinity, who has tortured us with good instincts and evil examples, is but a Frankenstein's Monster of our own making.

## VII

But to those who have suffered from them, such thoughts are too painful almost to bear recalling ; the recollection thereof, like that of Dante's forest, renews the horror.

So let us turn to the more human side of this controversy, which, viewed in a kindly spirit, is not without its pleasant humours. For on few occasions does the ingenuous self-importance of mankind show out more than when mankind sets about making its graven images. The practical activities of life, and the scientific ones, are hampered by material facts and intellectual necessities often foreign to the individual ; and even artistic creation, one of man's freest activities, is, after all, limited by questions of school and fashion, of teachers and of public. But each individual is working for himself solely and solitarily, expressing only his own wants and likings, when busy about the idol labelled God.

Talk of monotheism, forsooth ! Why there are as many gods as there are believers, and even more, for each believer may make himself a whole Olympus full in a lifetime, each god, of course, being, turn about, the true one. Take, for instance, the matter of liking and disliking, or rather of disliking, for in most people personality shows more in that. We all of us proceed on the assumption that God cannot like what we dislike, nor dislike what we like ; and if we all agree that he cannot possibly like evil, it is simply because evil admits of as many specifications as there are persons to do the specifying. I personally cannot believe that God can like vivisection ; but Professor James, as we have seen, has compared God to a person engaged in that pursuit ; on the other hand, it is plain that Professor James thinks that God cannot bear people who think like M. Renan, who, in his turn (as regards irony and indulgence rightly) perhaps surmised that God thought very much like himself. Meanwhile Mr. Ruskin, not without show of reason, thought God could not possibly like St. Peters ; Galileo, a religious savant, that God could not like the Ptolemaic System ; Origen, and other early Christians catalogued in Flaubert's *Temptations of St. Anthony*, that God could not possibly like Sex ; some other early Christians (and later transcendental philosophers) that God could still less possibly like a Material Universe. And meanwhile, among these conflicting statements, the one thing at all demonstrably certain is the existence of St. Peters, the Ptolemaic System, Sex, the Material Universe, and all the rest ; and the one thing logically presumable is that since they do exist, the cause of all

existence must have been somehow mixed up in their existing. . . .

I have said that people's religious views are even more determined (for I am fatally incapable of believing in a free *will to believe*) by their dislikings than by their likings. Dislike is a stronger feeling, as a rule, than liking; it is also one which suffers much more from need of sympathy (since the thing you like is in a way company), and, therefore, cries out for some one to share it. Moreover, there may be a degree of truth in the statement of certain pessimistic philosophers, that owing to some mysterious internal arrangement, mental or bodily, dislike—or as some people call it, disapproval, reprobation—gives a maximum of activity with a minimum of work, in other words, pleasure; gives you a sort of comfortable feeling of something to push against, and generally enlarges the happy flow of the vital spirits. I do not wish to be responsible for this notion; personally I am always trying to believe that I do not like disliking, and even if my practice bear it out, I feel I—well, I am bound to use the word—I *dislike* the theory of the pleasantness of disliking. Let me therefore appeal to the authority of Professor James, and thereby also end this digression on what we expect from our graven images, by resorting to what Professor James apparently expects from the one which he worships:—

“When, . . .” he writes, “we believe that a God is there, and that he is one of the claimants . . . the strenuous mood awakens at the sound. It saith among the trumpets ha! ha! it smelleth the battle afar off; the thunder of the captains and the shouting. *Its blood*

*is up ; and cruelty to lesser claims, so far from being a deterrent element, does but add to the stern joy with which it leaps to answer to the greater."*

This is tremendous ; and the passage I have italicised inspires me with fear of what may, some day, befall certain persons mentioned in previous pages of the volume. • I feel reassured, however, on reflecting that M. Renan and Professor Clifford, and especially Hegel, are safely gathered to their fathers ; that there are neither Alexandrian libraries to burn nor witches (or, rather, the latter would be salaried as mediums) ; and that Jacobin clubs, if they arise nowadays, are sure to guillotine at once so great a man of science as Professor James at the instigation of some nostrum-dealing Marat.

The God in whom Professor James *wills to believe* himself, and also wills that his neighbours should do alike, is, as the above quotation has suggested to the reader, essentially a Man of War. Now it is no good, even for a divinity, to be a Man of War in time of peace. Peace, therefore, is not at all what Professor James looks forward to (indeed, he more than once symbolises it as a tea-table presided over by Mr. Herbert Spencer), but rather a universe which shall be a happy hunting-ground for good and active men, presided over by a good and active God, with a certain amount of wickedness and misery preserved in it on purpose. And here is really Professor James's solution, not so much reasoned and explicit, but constitutional and implied, of the existence of evil. It becomes good as a necessary condition of the exercise of goodness. "Not the absence of vice," he exclaims, "but Vice



there, and Virtue holding it by the throat, seems the ideal human state"; and this being the case, it becomes plain that a perfectly good omnipotence could not have created mankind less sinful than it is. Indeed, all possible objections are forestalled by this conclusive view. For if one objected, that holding anything by the throat is but a low-class employment for Virtue, and that pleasure in cruelty to lesser claims smacks of our childish desire to be the detective who may lie and cheat in order to circumvent cheats and liars, or even of our ancestors' taste for fine avengers *à la* Titus Andronicus; if one suggested that a more amiable ideal was set before us by Jesus Christ, a very little reflection would prove that this was futile: that too much amiability would weaken the moral muscle, and that in the ideal state the breed of villains, as in hunting counties the breed of foxes, must be considered as sacred.

So much for Evil in the form of Vice. Professor James goes further in his justification of the First Cause. If vice is required for the sake of keeping mankind actively virtuous, a certain amount of misery is quite as necessary to enable mankind to feel happiness. For—

"Regarded as a stable finality, every outward good (and Professor James, by specifying *innocence*, also adds every inner grace) becomes a mere weariness to the flesh. It must be menaced, be occasionally lost, for its goodness to be fully felt as such. Nay, more than occasionally lost. No one knows the worth of innocence till he knows it is gone for ever." And so on.

That is conclusive. But if, therefore, this is the best of all possible universes, and its being bad is just a part of its goodness, why then there is no problem of evil at all, and there was no need for a *will to believe* in Chance, in Free Will, in ultimate justice on the human pattern, and in the Divinity being a kindly Vivisector. The best of all possible First Causes must evidently have created the best of all possible universes; and we might, without more ado, have rested in the optimism of Dr. Pangloss, as set forth by Voltaire in his *Candide*.

## VIII

But that immortal handbook of philosophy contains another saying which suits me and those who will *not to believe*, better; a saying less cosmic, no doubt, but easier to understand and act upon. "Tous les évènements sont enchainés dans le meilleur des mondes possible; car enfin, si vous n'aviez pas été chassé d'un beau château à grands coups de pied, &c., &c. . . . Cela est bien dit, répondit Candide; *mais il faut cultiver notre jardin.*"

Now, in the first place, it seems to me that the Panglossian theology, where he has adopted it, has betrayed Professor James into a statement which is damaging to the fruitful garden of human nature; when, in order to explain away the presence of misery in the world, he has insisted that without it we should cease to perceive happiness. But I have studied modern psychology in the splendid work of quite a different

Professor, William James (also of Harvard however, and who has collaborated in all the finest part of the present volume with his namesake), and can therefore state theoretically, what for the rest I should have always expected, that no one believes any longer in the old notions of necessary relativity between items of cognition; and that hot is hot, smooth is smooth, pleasant is pleasant, owing to direct relations between outer objects and ourselves, and would be so if cold, and rough, and disagreeable had remained *in mente dei*. And thus the normal human being requires no set-off to happiness, since he is so compounded that the mere ordinary variations in himself and his surroundings afford the variety necessary for it to be conscious. Hunger and satisfaction, sleep and waking, exercise and rest, alternate with each other in a rhythm of change and repetition requiring no stimulus of starvation or insomnia or *ennui*; even as the never-ending alternations of day and night, seasons and places, the never-ending changefulness of charm in material beauty and in the things of the intellect and the sentiment, require no irrelevante of hideousness, or wickedness, or unintelligibility (though such is furnished us in plenty!) to make us keenly enjoy them. Nay, health itself, which seems a relative conception, is a very positive reality, letting us know its presence by the joyousness and energy in which the very thought of disease is utterly forgotten. The powers of the universe have indeed, alas, given mankind hard things to suffer; but let us do them justice: they have not made that suffering a condition of happiness, like Professor

James's Creator (and Created ?) of restless and *blasés* mortals.

Thus much of the little garden which the experienced hero of Voltaire urged us to cultivate : the garden of strictly human capacities, human morality, human logic, human sense of beauty and fitness, all bounded by the faculties of man ; nay, perhaps all contained within man's limited faculties, and created by them : for who can tell what wilderness of Realities may lie beyond, of wilderness or even of not being ? I do not mean by this that we should check the passionate desire and speculation about that beyond. Indeed, the mirages which mankind sees beyond the flaming bounds of space and time are, in my opinion, as much an integral part of the human enclosure whence they are projected as the images thrown out by a magic lantern belong in reality to the room where they seem not to be, rather than to the stage across which they appear to move. Nay, among the things in this garden, wherein we are thus fatally enclosed, let us cherish as among the choicest some of these same *fata morgana* sights which it projects on to the inane beyond. Our ideas of an order of the universe, when such ideas are the result of mankind's wish for harmony and justice, are, after all, a kind of reality, a reality to the faculties which produce them ; and the divine figures, radiant in triumph, or ineffably touching in sorrow, who have heightened the joy and softened the suffering of the ages that are gone, have not only been the finest realities to those who believed in their objective existence, but ought, were we modest and wise, to remain among the most real

existences for the feeling of those who, like me, believe them to be but subjective creations. And in the falling to pieces of the old creeds, and the extrication therefrom of the various possible modes of conceiving a union of the spirit of man with the universe, Professor James has surely forgotten the best.

He dismisses as immoral such union as consists of a mere knowledge of God by his ways, and decides in favour of a union with God by co-operation with his intentions, by the conforming of our action to his wish. But besides these modes of unification, there remains another, which can be traced in the sentiment, if not in the dogma, of most of the creeds of the past, and in the instincts of many agnostics of the present, in the utterances of all great poets, believing or unbelieving, in the forefront of whom, with his hymn to the Sun, stands Francis of Assisi. I am speaking of the unification by love. By love, not as submission, but as enjoyment. There is a stage of consciousness which Professor James apparently omits in his list, or confuses with one of the other stages: the stage not of perception, nor of cognition, nor of volition, but of a consummation which seems the result, and teleologically speaking, the rational end of the never-ceasing flux of action from without and reaction from within. One may say of it, with Goethe's *Chorus Mysticus*, "hier wirds Ereignis"; but it is the attainable, not the unattainable, which is accomplished. Sensitiveness, cognition, volition, action; is there not in this incessant circling chain an omitted link called *satisfaction*? For satisfaction, to which all human

states tend (however balked in so doing), is in its turn the great replenisher of the various activities which subserve it. Can we grasp the universe, make it ours, assimilate as much of it as possible, in a fashion more complete than when we enjoy the universe, love it, *make use of the universe joyfully*? Nay, is it not this state of consummation, of satisfaction, of identification of man's wants and nature's possibilities, the only state in which the old problem of evil is solved, is banished and forgotten?

Not all that we know of the universe and the universe's ways conduces to this. Far from it. But what do cognition, volition, action, strive after save diminishing to the utmost our occasion of coming in contact with such of the ways of the universe as offend us? Perception, thought, decision, are all of them combined in an effort, which becomes ceaselessly more complex, to avoid pain and obtain pleasure, to forego the smaller pleasure for the sake of the larger, to avoid the greater pain by taking counsel of the smaller. All these activities tend, as I have said, to a state of harmony with our surroundings, a state of appreciation, of love of the happiness we feel.

And this state is just the one in which it becomes easiest to believe that what we call Evil may be merely what is unsuitable to us, and what, once eliminated from our neighbourhood, may find some proper sphere elsewhere, and become good to organisms different from ours. It is this kind of religious feeling which, in Antiquity and the Middle Ages, gave birth to art, man's one successful attempt to extract only good from the universe. And it is very likely, in the short

spells of such feeling that mankind has recovered strength sufficient to endure, to hope, and to strive.

## VIII

This also is a matter of individual constitution and habit. Those who require such a way of looking at life, inevitably *will to believe* in its possibility, and thereby realise it; for in matters of feeling, even if in no others, wishes are really horses and we all may ride.

And herewith I return to my starting-point, to wit, that the chief use of such speculations as these of Professor James's, and the use, I trust also, of my answers thereto, is to make us acquainted with various and equally desirable types of mind, each with its uses and drawbacks.

Is it possible for these different types of mind ever fully to understand the nature, the habits of each other? Will it be possible, for instance, for Professor James to realise that the writer of these notes is one of his warmest admirers? And is it then possible for me, while marshalling my counter-arguments, to remember the hundred points of agreement, the hundred luminous suggestions with which Professor James's essays have delighted me?

Alas, perhaps not. Of all things in the world, thorough perception of one's neighbour's existence is, on the whole, the most difficult. But in proportion to the difficulty should be the effort. Particularly on the part of those who, like myself, *will to believe*

that man's highest work is the realisation of a human ideal; and that the only Godhead which can make binding laws for man, is the divinity consubstantiate with his best self, and shaped in the glorified image of those he loves most.





'            ROSNY - AND THE  
FRENCH ANALYTICAL NOVEL



## ROSNY AND THE FRENCH ANALYTICAL NOVEL

### I

**S**HALL we ever obtain this *truth* which all novelists seem striving after, or have we ever obtained it—truth, *subjective* truth even, such as we find it, for instance, in Rousseau's "Confessions," or in certain veiled autobiographies, like "Werther" and "Adolphe" ?

A hundred reasons prevent the novelist from working with absolute fidelity to life ; and reluctance to abuse confidence, to hurt the feelings of his models, is the least important of these reasons. The strongest reason is that reality is reality, defies presentation by its complexity ; that a mutilated, isolated, arranged reality, with cause and effect freely upset, is no reality at all ; moreover, that it is doubtful whether any one save a professional novelist would give a thank you for real reality in a novel. Reality is valuable to us only as the raw material for something very different ; the artistic sense alters it into patterns, the logical faculty reduces it to ideas. Except for individual action, the individual case, which is the only *reality*, has no final importance.

But the novelist continues to delude himself; he piques himself upon the quality he cannot get. Most novelists (and the more deliberately realistic the worse) treat human life and character by a system of scientific fictions, deliberately simplifying phenomena till they become abstractions, diagrams; they pretend to explain as the result of a single factor, of grossly exaggerated importance what must have been the result of a dozen or a hundred factors. So, the real action copied from life is made the centre of a circle of unrealities.

Again, most novelists practise realism by explaining the unknown in one real personage by the known in another real personage, most commonly their own self. They fuse together two creatures of the same category, and think that two half organisms must necessarily make one whole, forgetting, alas! that you can unite only such parts as complete each other, but not such others as are either duplicates or substitutes; producing by such arrangements sirens and minotaurs, creatures who could not have assimilated with a bird's gizzard or a ruminant's stomach the food which must have passed through a human gullet or set in motion human limbs. At best they patch up centaurs, decorative animals who can trot and caper, because the artist paints them trotting and capering, but who have two stomachs and two pairs of lungs, those of the man and those of the horse, a reduplication which natural selection and Dr. Weissmann's "Law of Panmixia" render improbable.

Is this exaggeration? Scarcely. Is not a Père Goriot, for instance, an agglomeration of the parental

quality of at least a dozen parents, something analogous to the creature on the Shield of Sicily and the Isle of Man, made of three legs without a head or arms? The day will perhaps come when biological psychology and the study of individual cases, when, above all, a scientific habit of mind, will accustom us to the notion that an individual cannot be anything except himself; that if a real Tom were fused with a real Dick, and both with a real Harry, there would be an end to the three realities without the birth of a fourth one. We may then learn, perhaps, how real people are made up of various strands; the necessary fashion in which grandfather Falstaff reacts on great-grandfather Hamlet; and how maternal grandmother Clarissa Harlowe is modified or neutralised by paternal grandmother Becky Sharp; nay, what colour of hair and skin, what voice and gait, what physiological affinities and repulsions the various living puppets of the world's stage can have.

Meanwhile, the psychological novelist traffics in people's ignorance, and men like Bourget and Maupassant manufacture individuals and types much as our earliest ancestors made up bird-women, bull-men, and that magnificent human document, the bronze chimæra of Arezzo.

Luckily, there are still novelists without scientific pretensions, without mania for reality; or, shall we say, luckily there is among novelists a certain amount of intuition, of that synthetic and sympathetic creation which is genius. I will not even speak of Tolstoi. Far lesser men, like Bjørnsen and Rosny, have given us work which is intuitive and genial.

They do not make up a complete skeleton for sale out of odd bones picked out of the heap (I knew such a skeleton once, the property of a painter ; it had *French legs and the skull and spine of a Dutchman*). They tell us about creatures not objectively real, but not subjectively unreal, who have come to exist by a spontaneous stratification of impressions, in the transmuting heat of liking and disliking ; creatures who have life because born of the life, the preferences and aversions, the passionate hope and hostility of the author.

For the rest, should we regret the novelist's incapacity to compass reality ? Surely not. No book, only experience, could teach us to know the individual. Indeed, there is no individual to know ; since what we take for one is merely the impression made on ourselves by the ever-shrouded, mysterious selves of other folk. The novel cannot teach us to know the individual. But it can teach us certain general—very general—facts about classes and the surroundings of classes. It can teach us the influences to which individuals are subjected, whether of bodily crisis or of social position. Thus, all children cut their teeth and crawl on the floor ; all girls gradually evolve into women ; all people change ; all people have material wants, social ideals, national peculiarities. What if we might have known all this without the novelist's pseudo-realities ? We should not have found it out so efficiently, so universally ; we should have known these things piecemeal, superficially, always alike too late in the day, for want of something to make it worth our while—of something to catch our attention and enlist our

sympathies. Now, the novelist makes it worth our while. By interesting us in the unreal creatures, children of his wishes or diagrams of his analysis, he accustoms us to take interest in the living mysteries who walk, act, and suffer all round us. And when he is a great novelist—not an analyst, not a copyist of the actual, but a sympathetic artist, a passionate lover of the human creature—he can do infinitely more : he can people our fancy with living phantoms whom we love, he can enrich our life by the strange power called *charm*.

## II

I doubt whether Rosny will ever be popular, despite the force and the thoroughly human warmth of his genius. He is full of arduousness, of splendid qualities which take energy and intelligence to enjoy, mixed with unimportant defects which require even more energy and intelligence to overlook ; for, after all, is there not an art of appreciation, like an art of living, which consists in making the most of what is fruitful and pleasant, and disregarding what is tiresome and to no purpose ? There are not many good readers (though there be many subtle critics) in the world ; but, to such good readers as there are, Rosny, like Browning, will give much in return for much.

Speaking of Browning, Rosny always reminds me a little of Browning's Grammarian ; there is in him a combination or discord between rare distinction, amounting to exquisiteness sometimes, and a certain



## ROSNY AND

and pedantry, which we feel sure that Gramscian had also, going to be buried on the top of his rock, untidy, unkempt, having walked past much of the sweetness and beauty of life, nay, stumbled over it, in his absorption over the enclitic *de*.

Rosny possesses what among living French novelists is rather unique than rare—*sincerity*; he wishes to please himself, he does not make himself up for sale. Sincerity; and hence the highest kind of distinction—personal preference. He does not cast about him for subjects which have not yet been treated; he does not seek for the exotic in the wares of the Far East or in the Parisian dust-heap. His singular originality—the new views of life, the new kind of characters (his charming class of nature-lovers, men with intuition and sympathy for clouds, plants, beasts) which he gives us are due to the fact of his being a human individuality, full of individual likings and dislikings, long before he is a writer. Before setting about rather arduously describing, analysing, making things live again, he knows perfectly well that he cares for them in themselves, that they seem to him full of intrinsic importance. One feels sure, in dealing with Rosny, that he would have liked to *read* about the things he likes to write about; that they are for him what savages and virgin forests are to his little friend in “*l’Impérieuse Bonté*,” what storms and seas are to the doctor in “*Renouveau*,” what the poor abortions are to the divinely kind women in that strange book of his on charity. Rosny’s distinction of nature, his real aristocratic quality (as opposed to the odd impotencies and depravities which other French novelists cherish as

signs of superiority!) is also shown in that love for cleanness and strength which underlies his surgeon's, nay, his sick nurse's tenderness towards disease and suffering. He sees that strength alone can be divine; not, as a brutal misunderstanding of Darwinism is for ever telling us, because strength can crush weakness; but because, on the contrary, only through strength can weakness be compensated, neutralised, reclaimed. To the strong, the wise, the rich shall be given, because by them alone can more be given in return. The full personal life, according to Rosny, is the life which transcends mere personal wants and interests, or, rather, whose wants and interests are those also of others.

The little story called "Daniel Valgraive," though by no means among Rosny's most satisfactory work, is extremely significant of his temper and tendencies. It is a story of a man's victorious struggle with creeping death; death which is stealthily invading all his nobler part, trying to beat his soul back to the microscopic central *ego*, trying to canalise his last vigour into mere bitterness and envy. Valgraive is victorious. In him "la fatalité du bien" is irresistible, and death loses its sting. He lives, to the last moment of his life, in community with the life universal; and, instead of being extinguished before the bodily dissolution, his soul survives yet awhile, in the impulse of happiness it has given, in the love it has left.

Rosny has given us the reverse case in the painful and over-elaborate study called "Le Termite." Noël Servaise, destroyed piecemeal by bodily pain, is narrowing closer and closer; his tortured nerves perceive other folk only as obstacles and enemies, the world as a vague,

dreadful antagonist. Each time that the crisis of his malady is over, that the bodily agony is staved off for a time by liberation from the constantly re-forming calculus, the man becomes capable, to an extent at least, of liberation from his hideous self. Liberated, if only in the possibility of selfish love, of sensitiveness to the kindlier aspects of Nature, he knows joy, which is a union, however humble, with what is not his own wretched *ego*. One guesses that he may, if time be given, become almost capable of *love*. Or will the calculus, inexorably gathered together in his flesh, turn him back in agony on himself? This hero of the "Termite" is the outcast of Nature, *the creature who should never have been*; the creature born of the selfishness of others, of the shortcomings of our civilisation; the creature who deserves all the patience and understanding and tenderness of those who, unlike himself, can have patience and understanding and tenderness.

Of Rosny, further. The pedantic element shows itself, like nearly all intellectual and moral defects, in a lack of harmony between the writer and his subject; between the observer and the world; in a disproportion a separateness between the individual *ego* and the myriad multifold egos all round—the besetting sin of the whole French school of novelists, beginning with Balzac. Hence he lacks that sense of the mystery of other folk, nay, almost of the mystery of oneself, which makes the very greatest novelists so respectfully delicate in their handling of the human soul, even the cynical Stendhal, the jocular Thackeray; and which distinguishes so immeasurably the two greatest novelists of our age—Browning and Tolstoi. Rosny thinks

that he can penetrate into a human creature as he could penetrate, with knife and microscope, into a plant or a dead limb. He does not feel that the reality of another can never be coextensive, much less consubstantial, with any formula, or definition, or description; since our formulas, definitions, and descriptions are limited and conditioned by our individual experience and nature. The world is so vast, and every human soul so immense (the human soul which is, who knows? perhaps the close-packed soul stuff of a thousand ancestors), that whenever we paint, nay, see any portion thereof in minutest detail, we do so at the price of a monstrously disproportionate picture or vision; the flea's proboscis becomes that of an elephant, while the table or chair hard by becomes, by comparison, mere toy-box furniture. And Rosny, with unsuspecting awkwardness, calmly dismembering human life, does often present us with such microscope nightmares. I am thinking of portions of the otherwise splendid "*Indomptée*," but particularly of that gruesome book "*Le Termite*." I do not blame him in the least for deliberately analysing physical pain and its moral miseries. Such an analysis is, of course, atrociously painful to the reader; but is it not fair that we should be pained sometimes, in order to learn what pain others are feeling? And is it not as well that we should realise the wretched ruin of so many lives, considering that we have it in our power very often similarly to ruin the life of our neighbours, our children, and of the unborn generations? The moral object is surely legitimate. What I object to in Rosny—and, for the matter of that, in nearly all novelists of the

French analytic school—is that the psychological method is faulty. All these accounts of pain, greater or less, lack one of pain's most essential features—its evanescence; as, for the matter of that, all analysis of life lacks life's chief characteristic—change, instability. Rosny's hero probably did not realise the agonies of his crisis, once those agonies were over, in anything like the way in which we are made to realise them; for there is in literature a power of fixing impression, making it uniform and uniformly continuous, causing, as it were, the water which would run off in its natural channels to return for ever and ever by the artificial mechanism of a fountain. And this, the chief fault of Rosny, is the fault, of course, of less sincere and less genial writers, like Huysmans. In the case of Rosny's Noël Servaise, life, however honeycombed by suffering, was not composed solely thereof; however huge a minute, nay, a second, of pain, the painless minutes must take up a certain room; they are not eliminated by life, as they are eliminated by literary craft. If the novelist is to magnify, and all literature *must* magnify, it is not fair to magnify only one kind of life's many tissues. But the analytical Frenchman—and, alas! this great and delightful Rosny, worse almost than any—screw and screw at their lenses, magnify till the image enlarges to bursting, and begins, luckily for the operator, to swim in mist.

This tendency is what makes much of the odiousness of French novelists' treatment of female characters; they are not all cads, they are often merely literary pedants. Certainly, of all modern Frenchmen, Rosny is the most respectful, the most tender and serious in his

attitude to women. The young doctress, Nell Horn, above all, Eve, in the "Bilatéral," are among the finest and most charming women in all fiction. They are charming, they are such as we see them, as a result of Rosny's painting ; but the process of painting, so long as it goes on, is often such as one can barely watch without anger. Take that Eve in the "Bilatéral." Rosny gives us the material, he puts into our possession the sympathetic spell which makes her live, live with extraordinary fulness and charm of life ; but at the same time he gives an account of her which is false, and which we banish at once into the limbo of the un-lifelike. This charming young girl, under all her emancipated ideas, is but a new-born woman awaking to her woman's cravings for love and motherhood ; overcome sometimes by joy, sometimes by sadness, she knows not why, wondering vaguely she knows not at what. But she cannot, for all her familiarity with free-spoken men and pseudo-scientific books, she cannot, in her young entireness, be conscious of the meaning of it all ; she cannot, however well she knows the flames, realise, in her lack of all experience of life and change, understand such things as *phases* and *crises*. Now Rosny, perpetually harping on such matters, perpetually offering us *his* explanation of Eve's feelings, turns the poor girl into a sort of walking physiologico-psychologic demonstration ; we see not merely what the girl sees of herself, but her poor, innermost nature laid bare by the kind but intolerably blundering hands of a pedant. In his immortal *Natacha*, Tolstoi has given us the case of a girl situated much like Eve ; she also is traversing a

*crisis.* We know it, but she does not ; because Tolstoi respectfully refrains from telling us in the girl's presence the secrets which she cannot yet comprehend. For surely there is one thing which youth cannot know, which only experience can teach : that youth is a period of stress, that experience will come, that life is but phase, change, and the manifestation of hidden forces.

There is, perhaps, a dash of pedantry—there is certainly the usual French seeking after literary novelty, apart from real interest, in Rosny's strange descriptions of nature. One is worried at familiar sights being described in obscure terms of chemistry or botany ; one resents, in this case also, quite simple things, seen every day with the corner of the eye, being elaborated into marvellous enigmatic visions, which strain one's sight and intelligence. But for all this Rosny does give one, like no other modern, impressions of the splendour and mystery mingled in everyday things. Nay, the very unintelligibility of the phraseology of those names of acids and minerals and astronomic and botanic details reproduce some of the unintelligible impressions which make the wonderfulness of certain skies, certain night effects, tangles of vegetation, weirdnesses of town rubbish and factory outlines, Aladdin's palaces, built up we know not of what, labyrinths and galaxies composed of unguessable material. In this, as in his sympathy for profoundly intuitive natures, nay, with the life of dumb creatures, of plants, and of seas and skies, Rosny seems to free us from the weariness of those tiresome, workaday formulæ by which mankind, as it has reduced the material world into a kind of Army and Navy Stores

for its feeding and housing, has reduced its own thoughts and feelings to little better than a catalogue of the world's qualities as seen by the haberdasher and the caterer ; nothing left for other creatures, for the germs which live invisible in everything, or for the angels who guide the storms and the stars.

### III

Of course, Balzac was not the root of what I should call the psychological and literary nuisance in the novel: the looking at life as a subject for analysis and description, instead of analysing and describing such parts of life as had been found interesting or fascinating in the process of living.

It was not his example which made the modern French novel go the way it has gone ; his example would never have affected the Russians or the English. If Balzac has unduly influenced his countrymen, and influenced them by his faults even more than by his great qualities, it is surely because those faults were inherent in the French literary type of our century—faults due to the very strength of literary energy, the very richness of intellectual perception by which modern France has differed from its more practical, more sentimental, and, at all events, duller and more tongue-tied neighbours.

Balzac's method—for it became a method, and one universally imitated—consisted in writing about human beings, not according to the manner in which they, or the image of them, had affected him ; but according



to the manner in which they would present a most definite diagram, at best a most picturesque outline. He describes not characters with one exaggerated peculiarity, but one exaggerated, isolated peculiarity with a human person, a vague puppet, sometimes barely more than a name and a physical presentment—Hulot, Grandet, Pons, Rastignac—attached to it. As the medical boarder in the Pension Vauquer, *née* de Conflan, says of him, the Père Goriot is nothing but the *Bump of Philoprogenitiveness*. The rest of the brain, one might say, has been cut away. Now the real way in which the excessive preponderance of one portion of a character manifests itself is by subordinating, silencing, pushing into a corner, sending to sleep the other portion; but, for all this to happen, those other portions must exist. To begin with, every human being possesses, besides his more individual character, a sort of average character as human being, inherited from his ancestors and acquired from his neighbours; the psychological life of the one-sided person, of the monomaniac, consists in the gradual victory over this character (and over everything in himself to which it is attached), or in the gradual enslaving thereof in the service of that one faculty. Balzac's fault is to disregard or hide this uneven battle within the individual, and substitute for it the mere outer fight with other folk and with circumstances; hence, instead of the life of a human being, we get a sociological diagram of forces and resistances. In order to realise this fact, one should compare Balzac with another novelist, but belonging to the human, non-analytic, non-literary sort, namely Thackeray, in his

treatment of one-sided character. Take Colonel Newcome. He, too, might have been described as a *bosse de la paternité* rather than a whole human being. But in him paternal fondness is connected with a half dozen cognate qualities. It goes over into tenderness towards all young and weak creatures, it borders on high chivalry, and for qualities produce one another. But if Thackeray seem insufficiently typical in his work, and Colonel Newcome seem insufficiently paternal, take Shakespeare, and place by the side of Goriot no less a father than King Lear. For him paternal infatuation arises not, as with Colonel Newcome, from readiness to love, but from a mania for being loved; and this strange selfishness mixed with generosity goes over into jealousy, graspingness, injustice, and that tragic alternation of rage and weakness, of proud raillery and childish complaint. But Père Goriot's paternal infatuation arises from nothing, and is connected with nothing; it is inorganic, at best utterly maniacal—in truth it is a literary diagram. How unlike anything living must needs be to a diagram, we can all of us study in observing one of the most one-sided, nay, one of the most maniacal varieties of human being—the vain man. In him we can watch how, where the vanity does not interfere, qualities of a very different kind can be very active—intellectual interest, kindliness, honesty, the very qualities which take a man most out of himself, the most incompatible with vanity; or else we can watch, as in Meredith's "Egoist," how vanity, instead of obliterating, will merely appropriate and enslave such qualities as clash with it, until a man's genuine impulses, his sincerest thoughts and actions

change their nature, find a new basis, and become mere lies.

Different as are, for instance, Flaubert and Zola, they belong, nevertheless, to the same school as Balzac, if we compare them with Tolstoi, Dostoievsky, or even Björnsen. Flaubert, with his effects produced by extreme elimination of detail, and Zola, so brimful and often overwhelming, are yet alike in the fundamental character of writers whose knowledge proceeds from deliberate study, and whose interest in the subject is due to its being a subject, and a good one. One has, not unfrequently, the feeling that these great men have sat down in front of the portion of life they have undertaken to treat, after casting about for months and weeks for something to write about, and one remembers the astonishing lamentations of certain contemporary novelists interviewed by M. Huret, making enumerations of every recondite unspeakableness with the melancholy comment, "on a déjà fait cela—on a même fait cela." About all writers of this school, major and minor, gods or mice, it is clear to the reader that there is no reason for supposing them to have anything to do with life in any form, to be alive, or to have been alive. Were it not that we know, from different sources, that novels are written by men, and that we run easily to anthropomorphism in all matters, we might quite well put down "Le Père Goriot," "La Cousine Bette," "Mme. Bovary," "L'Assommoir," and all the novels of MM. de Goncourt and of M. Huysmans to the agency of some more or less divine Chance in the manner of Lucretius, or to some wonderful literary machine, phonograph and camera combined

with some contriving and superposing mechanism for the automatic production of types.

Opposite to this school of analytical, literary, professional novelists like Balzac, there exists, in sharpest contrast, the school of sympathising, personal, in a way unprofessional novelists, whose greatest representative is Tolstoi; and which, with no idea of derivation, but merely to give one of the most marvellous literary personalities his due, I should call the *school of Stendhal*.

The novel of this school, which has representatives in all countries—for the greatest novelists, from the author of “Manon Lescaut” to the author of “Vanity Fair,” all belong to it—the novel of this school seems not written, but lived. It affects us as being so much of life which the author has gone through, and he seems to us to be lurking always in one—nay, sometimes in all—of the characters: that life has indeed been lived by the author, not in the body, most likely, but in the spirit; he has really been one of those characters in the fervour of sympathetic creation, for there is nothing here which has been observed, constructed, invented—it has been a reality, an inevitable sequence in the imaginative experience of the writer. What such novelists tell us has the weight of the words of an eyewitness; it has even, frequently, increasing that weight, an eyewitness’s vagueness and unaccountableness. For the man in whose presence (or in whose soul) certain things have actually taken place, does not know about them with the same sort of clearness as the man who has followed a deliberate experiment, or reconstructed *the how things must have happened* by a

*process of circumstantial logic. And there is in life—* life spontaneous, flowing, complete, not life artificially arranged by experiment—an inevitable share of vagueness, due to the fact that all life is, after all, the perception thereof by one creature at one moment, full therefore of gaps and lapses. Neither is there in life any unity of point of view, hence no stable system of outlines or of colouring. Nothing is less like life, that is to say, like our experience, than that marvellous solidity, all-roundness, fulness, and almost distressing *projection* of the analytic school of novel. It is quite possible—contrary to the opinion of impressionists—that a painted picture full of extreme detail should give us a satisfactory sense of realisation; because, like the picture itself, the real objects are in most cases stationary, allowing us to take in their detail, deliberately to sit and stare. But life does not allow you to sit and stare; at least, it is not the same portion of life which we are sitting in front of and staring at. It is only by photographing the single instances, and then patching them together by a sort of reversed analysis; it is only by *thinking it out* that we ever know very clearly how anything ever happens. Clearness is a desideratum, a product of the human mind, which life itself has no use for. Hence there is something convincing in the very vagueness with which, as with a real atmosphere, the unanalytical novelists frequently envelop events and persons. We feel Manon Lescaut to have lived and died, because we feel Des Grieux's love and despair. She is a phantom, but a real one, as are the lovers and sweet-hearts unseen by us, but not unfelt, of our friends.

We understand Mme. Bovary, Cousine Bette, Rougon, Numa Roumestan, or the hero of "En Route"; and in a certain measure we do *not* understand, we cannot account for all their doings, Natacha, Levine, the little heroine of Bjørnsen's "In God's Ways," or Stendhal's Duchess, or Julien Sorel; but, unless we are singularly presumptuous and deluded, neither do we understand with any such fearful certainty our nearest and dearest, nay, ourselves.

As it is with the personages, so it is, to a certain extent, with the places. We know that town in Norway, that house at Moscow, with the mixture of clearness and vagueness of real places in our memory. Above all, with a very definite and special emotion; whereas the places in Balzac, Zola, and even in Flaubert (think of Flaubert's Carthage!) are such as we know very distinctly at the moment of looking at them, even as we know pictures, but with no mood attaching to them, and quite without that indefinable familiarity which tells us, however vaguely, about the omitted parts: where that road leads to, and what there is on the other side of that block of houses or group of trees; a sort of halo of knowledge, which means that, in body or in spirit, we have been in those places.

#### IV

There is another, and a far graver objection to be made against this, that I have called the professional or literary school of novel: it is morally arid in its perpetual pessimism; it refuses the reader what, after

all, we claim from literature, as from other art, more imperiously than we claim skill, imagination, knowledge, or even the *sense of life*, and that is the sense *that life is good*. We are made neither more happy nor more fit for happiness by the perpetual insistence on the ugly side of things, the perpetual assurance of this hopelessness. Moreover, if we are at all normally constituted, with the normal experience of good and evil, we recognise not merely that such a view of life is false, but also, when it becomes universal in a writer or a school of writers, that it is not at all—how express it?—well, not at all *noble*. For such a pessimistic attitude—the attitude of Flaubert, Zola, the Goncourts, Maupassant, let alone all the little masters—renders the attainment of artistic impressiveness quite infinitely easier. Nay, it becomes an almost mechanical, automatic method for awakening the kind of emotion which is, after all, the crudest of any—the black mood. It is significant that whereas Shakespeare alternates serenity with gloom, sadness with joy, expressing life, and various aspects in words sometimes heroically gay, sometimes bitter and hopeless, the lesser men, Marston, Webster, Tourneur or Ford, know only horrors and misery, and only a philosophy of pessimistic vanity or stoical indifference. For an unmixed kind of emotion is easier to deal with than any kind of alternation, a harmony is easier to construct out of few elements than many; and of all kinds of emotions the gloomy is the easiest to play upon; an artistic element more easy to manage. It takes the highest genius to mingle and harmonise the sad and the joyous, the easily lived and the painfully felt, as in Tolstoi's marvellous

symphonies. And it is even more difficult—impossible for any length of time—to play on the tonalities of unmixed optimism. Hence it is quite natural that a people so artistically constructed as the French, a school of writers so superbly literary, should succumb to artistic dodgery, to school methods and royal roads; the novel, like a certain sort of painting, has become in France so organised as to be virtually *à la portée de tous*. Now, of such school methods and literary royal roads, pessimism is one of the most obvious. It is a method and a mannerism.

Pessimism gives, moreover, a false sense of superiority both to the writer and the reader. The reader feels, in dealing with imaginary miseries as matters of course, that he is endowed with fortitude and not to be duped by the powers above; the writer gains a Promethean attitude which immensely increases his sense of power. Nay, the very sensitiveness and honesty of a man will be warped into such a cheap view of life. It takes an enormous dose of either to resist the tendency to be pitiful or sarcastic where there is nothing to be pitiful or sarcastic about; one needs to be very honest to be, so to speak, theoretically, nay more, *rhetorically* honest with life's deserts and shortcomings. And the literary instinct, the artistic traditions of our French contemporaries have apparently cost them this higher, this thoroughly independent sensitiveness and honesty towards life.

Of none of them does one feel this so acutely, I think, as of Maupassant, and in exact proportion to his admirable literary qualities. Think of a book like "Bel Ami." Everyone, alas, who has lived at all in



the world (and particularly in the plain speaking world of the Latins) has heard stories like those making up this novel ; and has, many a time, had people pointed out who would have fitted into it. But all this, as one has caught whiffs from drains and sinks, with tolerably breathable air between. Maupassant seems to live permanently in these stenches, his thoughts, during the elaboration of a volume of three hundred and fifty closely printed pages, know nothing else ; and that he should have enjoyed the writing, and any person the reading, strikes me as scarcely human. It is by comparison with a book like "Bel Ami" that one sees what it is that makes Zola endurable. That very element which mars the homogeneousness of his work and takes from its trustworthiness, that Victor Hugo-like tendency to see things in fantastic lights, to translate the (alas ! normally) nasty into the super-humanly terrible. This allows him to write, or rather enables us to read, books on such subjects as "Germinal" and even "La Terre." We can survive (it seems) in madness situations which would kill the sane. The mind, diverted to feelings of strength and wonder, can stand the strain of otherwise unendurable horrors ; and, in the presence of Zola's wicked Earth sending up villains as it sends up wheat ears, with monstrous indifferent fertility ; in the presence of that mine of his which swallows cartloads of human life and suffering, we can endure sights which would be unendurable shown in their real proportions, and shown as the only reality existing.

But Maupassant eliminates with unswerving instinct everything which is not mean, and groups into a

perfectly graduated pattern everything which is thoroughly ignoble. In real life things are only very occasionally what we call artistic : reality is not always ironical any more than it is always in agreeable perspective. Within sight of my house is a hill, with trees and houses, which is quite perfect as to arrangement ; but all around are other hills, fields, trees, houses, which seem all scattered any how. Similarly, I know of several female orphanages which were founded in a most uninteresting way by quite respectable women ; while I know only one orphanage of the sort which was founded by a lady of exceedingly light manners. The French novelist, who is an artist (sometimes much more so than the contemporary French painter), refuses to speak of the orphanages founded by the respectable ladies, as the painter would refuse to paint the hills and houses and trees all scattered at random ; he spots at once and instantly notes down the disreputable lady's foundation : *that* has a point, makes a pattern, is worth talking about ! What sort of reality, what picture of life, can such men give us ? They can no more be trusted than the etcher, who looks out for lines converging into head and tail-pieces, can be trusted for a faithful statement of ten miles of road. The artistic sense—the artistic sense applied to literature, which is at once infinitely less and infinitely more than art—the dramatic love for contrast, irony, and climax are as fatal to truthfulness in the novel as any three unities and other classical requirements were fatal, once upon a time, to truthfulness in the French play.

But, you will say, why ask for truthfulness ? why

not be satisfied with what these men really give, which is *art*, and not ask them for what they only *say* they give, which is reality? Have we not been seeing that real reality, objective or subjective, is unattainable in the novel; that its creations are, when most scientific, mere bird-women and men-horses, chimæras, fantastic monsters?

True. But there is, in this curious anomalous art of literature, an artistic quality without complete analogy in painting, or sculpture, or music, and which transcends all external convergence, pattern, climax, and the rest. And there is within the power of the novelist a kind of reality, a quality which affects us as truthfulness, which far surpasses in efficacy the utmost fidelity to single cases, or the highest clearness of typical diagrams. What this quality consists in, on what it depends, is one of the many mysteries of the mysterious province of aesthetics, and even to exemplify it would require as many notes as these, and about a totally different set of writers. We should have, above all, to speak of those two most different men, who are yet alike in their special supremacy, Stendhal and Tolstoi . . . . But the mere mention of their names will suggest to the reader—at least, as a matter of feeling—what is this quality in the novel which transcends all minor artistic qualities, and what is this un-real truthfulness, by which the greatest novelists subdue our souls more efficaciously than by any detail or any diagram! The only name I can find for it is *sympathy*, or passionate personal interest. Stendhal, Thackeray, Tolstoi, even our golden but clay-footed idol, Meredith, care for what they write about more than for

their own writing. They are, whether cosmopolitan cynics, bourgeois moralists, religious reformers, or harum-scarum chivalrous romanticists, all alike in their passionate preference for their Duchesses, their Sorels, their Becky Sharps, and their Colonel Newcomes; their Pierres, Levines, Annas, and Natachas; their Beauchamps and Diana Warwicks. And this most potent æsthetic magic acting within acts on their reader. He is convinced, enthralled; he is satisfied that all this must be real, since he is made to love or hate it.

These thoughts on realism, satisfactory and unsatisfactory, have naturally grouped themselves in my mind, around the work of J. H. Rosny, because, among French novelists, he is, perhaps, the most important, since Stendhal, who has cared for his subject more than for his treatment.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The above was written more than ten years before the appearance of the incomparable "Jean-Christophe" of M. Romain Rolland.



**THE ECONOMIC PARASITISM OF  
WOMEN**



## THE ECONOMIC PARASITISM OF WOMEN

“THESE lovely ladies and the like of them, are the very head and front of mischief ; first because . . . they have it in their power to do whatever they like with men and things, and yet do so little with either ; and, secondly, because, by very reason of their beauty and virtue, they have become the excuse for all the iniquity of our days ; it seems so impossible that the social order which produces such creatures should be a wrong one.”—RUSKIN, *For's Clavigera*, Letter 80.

### I

In writing this preface for a translation of Mrs. Stetson's "Women and Economics," and in recommending the original to my Anglo-Saxon readers, I am accomplishing the duty of a convert. I believe that "Women and Economics" ought to open the eyes, and, I think, also the hearts, of other readers, because it has opened my own, to the real importance of what is known as the Woman Question.



I must begin by confessing that the question which goes by that name had never attracted my attention, or, rather, that I had on every occasion evaded and avoided it. Not in the least, however, on account of any ridicule which may attach to it. There is, thank goodness, a spice of absurdity in every person, and in every thing, we care for in this world ; and the dear little old lady in Henry James's "Bostonians," who pathetically exclaims : "And would you condemn us to remain mere lovely baubles?" is the very creature to endear a *cause* : she is the Brother Juniper, so to speak, of the Woman Question.

My vague avoidance of the movement was not even due to the perception of some of the less enjoyable peculiarities of its devotees. For a very small knowledge of mankind, and a very slight degree of historical culture, suffice to teach one that it is not the well-balanced, the lucid, the sympathisingly indulgent or the especially gracious and graceful among human beings who are employed by Providence for the attack and possible destruction of long-organised social evils : nay, that martyrdom on behalf of any new cause begins, one may say, by the constitution of the martyr as an inevitable eccentric, unconscious of the diffidence, the scepticism, the sympathy, the sense of fitness and measure which check, divert, or hamper normal human beings. The early saints, judging by St. Augustine's "Confessions" and the "*Legenda Aurea*," must have been appalling prigs, indifferent to family affections, higher literature, hygiene, and rational cookery ; while the Hebrew Prophets were quite devoid of their historian's—M. Renan's—intelligent indulgence for

the administrative passion of, say, Nebuchadnezzar, or the touching pleasure in *toilettes* of Queen Jezebel. And, as to Socialists, who may be considered as the modern representatives of such virtuous tactlessness, we have all seen something of them, and of their well-meant efforts to clash with our habits of dress and manners, and to ruffle our feelings on trifling occasions. So that it does not require the generalising genius of Dr. Nordau, clapping Tolstoi and Ibsen into his specimen-box of "Degenerates," to tell us that the Woman Question, Feminism, is likely to be taken up by those disconnected and disjointed personalities who are attracted by every other kind of thing in *ism*; whose power consists a little in their very inferiority; and whose abnormal and often morbid "pleasure in saying 'No'" (as Nietzsche puts it) is, after all, alas! alas! so very necessary in this world of quite normally stupid and normally selfish and normally virtuous "pleasure in saying 'Yes.'" . . .

All these things I knew, of course, and I do not really think it was any of them which made me thus indifferent, and perhaps even a little hostile, towards that Woman Question. Indeed, when I seek in the depths of my consciousness, I think the real mischief lay in that word "Woman." For while that movement was, of course, intended to break down the barriers—legal, professional, educational and social—which still exist between the sexes, the inevitable pitting of one of these sexes against the other, the inevitable harping on what can or cannot, or must or must not be done, said or thought by women, because they are not men (women! women! everlastingly women!), produced a special

feeling, pervading, overpowering, unendurable (like that of visiting a harem or a nunnery), due to that perpetual obtrusion of the one fact of sex, while the other fact of *human nature*, the universal, chaste fact represented by the word *Homo* as distinguished from mere *Vir* and *Femina*, seemed for the moment lost sight of.

And somehow—if one is worth one's salt, if one feels normal kinship not only with the talking and (occasionally) thinking creatures around one, but also with animals, plants, earth, skies, waters, and all things past and present; if one be able, as every decent specimen of genus *Homo* must, to join in Francis of Assisi's "*Laudes omnium creaturarum*"—why, then, one feels a little bored, a little outraged, nay, even sickened, by this everlasting question of sex qualifications and sex disqualifications; and (very unjustly, but perhaps therefore very naturally) one gets to shrink from that particular question exactly because it is the *Woman Question*.

Very unjustly. Let me repeat that; and remind the reader that what I am describing is my still unregenerate state.

## II

My conversion to the importance of the Woman Question was, as I have said, the work of "Women and Economics"; and I was thus converted by Mrs. Stetson's unpretending little book, because in it the rights and wrongs of *Femina*, *das Weib*, were not merely opposed to the rights and wrongs of *Vir*, *der*

*Mann*, but subordinated to those of what is, after all, a bigger item of creation : *Homo, der Mensch*.

There was nothing new in connecting the Woman Question with Economics. If I may judge by myself, the majority of people who know anything of Political Economy must be accustomed to regard such questions as marriage, divorce, prostitution, the legal position of mothers and fathers, and many of the peculiarities of law and custom with respect to the sexes, as hinging upon the facts of wealth production and distribution, tenure of soil, heredity and division of property ; upon the whole immense question of the individual's share in the products of nature, of invention and of industry. Indeed, I much suspect that, as in my case, many thinking persons shelve the question of women's abilities and disabilities exactly because it seems to depend almost completely upon the far more important question of the redistribution of wealth ; to demand only a minor act of social justice and social practicality (bringing much waste energy under cultivation) inevitably involved in the greater act of social justice and social practicality which, through revolution or evolution, must needs take place some day or other.

The originality, the scientific soundness and moral efficacy of "Women and Economics," appear to me to lie in its partially reversing this fact ; and in its substituting a moral and psychological reason for the rather miraculous mechanicalness which mars every form of the "historical materialism" of the Marxian school. In other words, this book shows that the present condition of women—their state of dependence,

tutelage, and semi-idleness ; their sequestration from the discipline of competition and social selection, in fact their economic parasitism—is in itself a most important factor in the wrongness of all our economic arrangements, in the insufficient production, the wasteful expenditure, the degrading mal-distribution of wealth.

This main thesis of the book can be summed up as follows :

In consequence of the immense benefit which a prolonged stage of infancy, that is to say of intellectual and moral plasticity, obtained for the human race, all other advantages tended, during the beginnings of civilisation, and have tended ever since, to be sacrificed to the rearing of children ; and, first and foremost there has been sacrificed to it that equality in the power of obtaining sustenance, and that consequent mutual independence in such matters, which we find existing between the male and female half of almost every other race of animal. The human race, as has been continually demonstrated (but, perhaps, nowhere so well as in the studies on the Play Instinct of Professor Karl Groos), has obtained much of its superiority through the partial replacing of instinct by individual experiment and conscious tradition ; but this has meant that the human infant has been born into the world far less mature, far less typically developed, and far less near to independence than the young sheep which can walk within half an hour of its birth, let alone of the chick which can find the right seed almost as soon as it has broken out of the shell. In proportion as the human adult has become rich in

individual powers, has the human infant required a longer and longer period of tutelage ; with the result of requiring of the human mother a longer and longer devotion of her strength, her mind, and, even more, of her time, to the rearing of offspring. The difference between the female of genus *homo* and the female of other genera has therefore originated not in a longer period of gestation (for that of the horse, for instance, is nearly one-third longer), but in a longer period of education of the young. The different position of the female whom we call *Woman* is due to a difference not in physiological but in sociological functions.

For the longer duration of human infancy, and, even more, the greater helplessness, the greater educability of the human infant, has made it difficult, and in some cases impossible, for the human mother to find food for herself, let alone food for her growing and already weaned child. Hence, the continuance of the human race has called forth a personage who (save among birds, so oddly like human beings in many things) can scarcely be said to exist among animals : the Father. The Father, as distinguished from the mere begetter ; the pseudo-father in many stages of primitive life (without ironical references to later stages of existence !), the uncle, the maternal male relative, the head of the tribe, the patriarch : the man who provides food for the child, and food for the woman who rears it ; the man who procures, by industry, or violence, a home (cave, cabin, tent, or house) in which the woman remains with the children, while he himself goes forth to hunt, to tend flocks, to make captives,

to till the ground, to buy and sell ; and in modern times to do those hundred curious things which, producing no tangible product, come under the heading of "making money."

This all seems very simple ; but the consequences are complex. The female *homo*, thus left to rear the children (and do what else she can), becomes, what the female of other animals is not, or only (in birds and certain lower creatures) for a very short time, the *dependent* of the male *homo*. The home which she inhabits is *his* home, the food she eats is *his* food, the children she rears become, whether father or only patriarch, *his* children ; and, by a natural devolution, she herself, the woman thus dependent upon his activity and thus appropriated to his children's service, becomes part and parcel of the home, of the goods, of the children ; becomes appropriated to the nursing, the cooking, the clothing, the keeping in repair ; becomes, thus amalgamated with the man's property, a piece of property herself, body and soul, a slave (often originally a captive, stolen or bought), and what every slave naturally is, a chattel. By this process, therefore, we have obtained a primitive human group, differing most essentially from the group composed by the male and female of other genera : the man and the woman, *vir ac femina*, do not stand opposite one another, he a little taller, she a little rounder, like Adam and Eve on the panels of Memling or Kranach ; but in a quite asymmetrical relation : a big man, as in certain archaic statues, holding in his hand a little woman ; a god (if we are poetical, and if we face the advantages of the case) protecting a human creature ;

or (if we are cynical, and look to the disadvantages) a human being playing with a doll.

### III

In his remarkable book, "*Division du Travail Social*," M. Emile Durkheim writes as follows :

"The female of those remotest ages was by no means the feeble being that she has gradually become as a result of increasing morality. Prehistoric bones make it quite plain to us that, in those earliest times, there was much less difference of strength than we find nowadays between the two sexes. And even now, we find that during childhood the skeletons of the male and female present but little difference ; the characteristics being, on the whole, rather feminine. If, therefore, we admit that the growth of the individual reproduces, so to speak, on a small scale, the development of the species, then we may fairly conjecture that the same similarity between the sexes existed at the beginning of human evolution, and we may regard the feminine form as an approximation to that original single type of humanity, from which the masculine variety has gradually become differentiated.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Readers who wish to find this question of the original predominance of the female discussed with more liberality of view than in the above quotation, should read (and for other reasons also) Mr. Lester Ward's extremely suggestive volume on "*Pure Sociology*." For the biological facts and theories consult Geddes and Thomson, "*The Evolution of Sex*." Neither of these books has any practical bias.



“As regards the highest organ of physical and psychical life, it has been shown by Dr. Lebon, with mathematical precision, that the brain of both sexes *must have originally presented just such a degree of similarity*. The comparison of a large number of skulls, selected among the most different races and civilisations, has led him to the following conclusion : that, if we compare individuals of the same age, of the same stature and weight, the brain of the male will be found considerably bulkier than that of the female ; and that this inequality increases regularly with the increase of civilisation ; in such a way that the brain and, therefore, the mind of the woman is constantly tending to differ, to her disadvantage, from the brain and the mind of the man. For instance, the difference found to exist between the average skulls of modern Parisians of the two sexes is almost double the difference which exists between the male and female skulls of the ancient Egyptians. A German anthropologist, Bischoff, has come to the same conclusions on this subject as Dr. Lebon. This anatomical resemblance is accompanied by similarity of function. For, in these early civilisations, the feminine functions are not sharply marked off from the masculine ones ; on the contrary, the two sexes lead very much the same life. There are even nowadays a considerable number of savage races where the woman takes her share in political life. This has been remarked more especially among the American Indians, like the Iroquois and Natchez ; also at Hawaii, where the female shares the life of the men in a hundred ways ; also in New Zealand and Samoa. Similarly, it is not rare to find

the women accompanying their men on warlike expeditions, urging them on in the fray and even taking an active part in it. In Cuba and in Dahomey also they are as warlike as the men, and fight by their side. . . . Now, it is to be observed that, among all these peoples, the institution of marriage is extremely rudimentary. . . . We are acquainted with a type of family, comparatively near us in time, and which possesses only a germ, so to speak, of marriage : we allude to the *maternal family*. . . . In this, marriage, or what goes by the name of marriage, consists in but few obligations, frequently limited also in duration, which bind the husband to the wife's relations. . . . Whereas, the further we advance, and the nearer we draw to modern times, the more also do we see marriage take on in complexity. . . . And it is certain that, at the same time, we find a greater and greater division of labour as between the two sexes. . . . For ages past woman has withdrawn from warfare and public business and concentrated all her activities within the limits of the individual family. And the part which she plays has become only more and more specialised ; so that nowadays, and among civilised nations, the female leads a life absolutely different from that of the male. It is as if the two great halves of the soul's life had become severed, and as if one of the two sexes had appropriated the emotional functions and the other the functions of the intellect."

I am very glad to have been able to furnish my reader, instead of a *précis* of parts of "Women and Economics," the above quotation on the subject of that equality of faculties and community of functions which

may (or may not) have originally existed between the two halves of genus *homo*, and upon that subsequent differentiation which resulted in what M. Durkheim has aptly and joyfully defined as a "stationary or even retrograde tendency" in the female skull. For, to such readers as have reason (perhaps owing to their superior knowledge) for giving much weight to similar statements about prehistoric civilisations; and to such readers also as feel that the fact of having possessed any particular desideratum in the past constitutes a better claim to its possession in the future, to both these classes of readers, it must be much more satisfactory to be assured of the original and primæval importance of womankind by M. Durkheim, who jubilates at the "*stationnement et régression des crânes féminins*" as a splendid argument in favour of thorough-going division of labour, than to take it on the authority of Mrs. Stetson herself, who, of course, may be suspected of partiality for any hypotheses redounding to the glory of our earliest mothers.

I am also glad to have devolved, so to speak, the *onus probandi* of the original equality of male and female skulls, of the primitive similarity of habits, functions, and powers of the two sexes, and particularly the responsibility for that uncertain spectre, the "Matriarch," on to an adversary of female emancipation; because I suspect that, in the undeveloped state of anthropology and prehistoric sociology, the alleged facts and cherished hypotheses of one day are sure to be upset the next. And also because I have a very strong feeling that the desirability of any particular thing in the future has nothing to do with its existence or non-

existence in the past; and that the question of the position of women, say, in the year 2000 A.D., will depend not upon the position of women in the year—well, the year 20,000 before the Deluge—but upon the condition of the world at large, the intellectual, moral, particularly economical state of men and women, in our own times. For to a believer in the principle of evolution, the nature, the fate, of an organ, a faculty, an institution, an art, a class or a sex, are a matter of adaptation to the condition of everything else which can affect it; the specialisation—even that “division of labour” which M. Durkheim places (instead of poor old happiness, long since dethroned) as the aim of all human effort—the social organisation we are all so proud of (marriage laws, private property, inheritance, army, bureaucracy, public instruction), have had, after all, exceedingly humble origins. Man himself—I will not say *Homo* Himself or Herself—has developed out of some very simple bit of slime; so why should the women of the future require to prove so many quarterings, to demonstrate that she is of decayed nobility, to point to genealogical trees with a Matriarch at their root?

#### IV

Thus, in my opinion, Mrs. Stetson's truly valuable achievement consists in showing that the exclusion of women from the world's activity and their subordination to men, have ceased to be either beneficial or inevitable, however beneficial and inevitable they may have been towards securing the lengthened infancy and

greater educability of human beings, and also the storage and increase of inventions and laws, thanks to a rigidly organised home. Mrs. Stetson has satisfactorily demonstrated (to me at least) that one particular automatic arrangement of social evolution has done its work: like slavery, like serfage, like feudalism, like monasticism, like centralisation (according to individualists), like capitalism (according to socialists), the subordination of women has served its purpose and now become an impediment to progress; an impediment which progress is therefore bound to sweep away. The childhood, the greater teachableness of genus *homo* can now no longer be endangered; and a large proportion of human education has, since thousands of years, passed from the care of the mother to that of the community as a whole, or of portions—guilds, priesthoods, universities, and so forth—of the community; while, on the other hand, the inventions and traditions have been stored, multiplied, and diffused far beyond the powers of family education. Civilisation is being impoverished by the paying off of a debt. It is time that debt should be cancelled. The benefit has long been secured beyond all possibility of loss; but the price is still being paid. Now what is this price? M. Durkheim and the sociologists of whom he is typical, have answered with complacent simplicity: “The stagnation and regression of the Female Mind.” Less easily pleased than these learned theorists, Mrs. Stetson has set about analysing the facts covered by their satisfactory little sentence, and demonstrating in detail what the “Stagnation and Regression of the Female Mind” implies. She has

shown that it means the removal of womankind from the field of action and reaction called the universe at large to the field of action and reaction called "the family circle"; the substitution, as a factor of adaptation and selection, of the preference of the husband or possible husband for the preferences, so to speak, of the whole of creation. In other words, the sequestration of the capacities of one half of the human race, and their enclosure inside the habits and powers of the other half of the human race. Briefly, a condition in which the man plays the part of the animal who moves and feeds freely on the earth's surface; and the woman the part of the parasitic creature who lives inside that animal's tissues. The comparison is exact; but we ought not to push the analogy to the point of considering the parasitism of womankind as the parasitism of a destructive microbe. The mischief lies not in the fact of parasitism (does not M. Durkheim assure us that all co-operation is a form of parasitism, and the co-operation of the woman absolutely requires her parasitism?), but in the fact that this parasitic life has developed in the parasite one set of faculties and atrophied another; atrophied the faculties which the woman had (or might have had, even if in lesser degree) in common with the man, and developed those which were due to the fact of her being a woman.

Philosophers and others of M. Durkheim's way of thinking will here interrupt in favour of those qualities thus developed; and insist that the distinctively feminine peculiarities are not a drawback, but a blessing. Of course some are. But even if we admit that chastity, maternal unselfishness, tender-

ness, gentleness, are due to woman's dependent position (a theory invalidated by the coyness in courtship and the passion for their young of she-animals, who are anything but dependent on their males), and if we add to these solid perfections, æsthetic graces which the æsthetic Greeks by no means viewed as especially feminine; even if we grant for argument's sake that all the good in women is due to their parasitic status, this gain must be added to the main advantage resulting from "feminine stagnation and regression," namely, the prolongation of childhood and the establishment of the family group, not deducted from the price at which it has been bought. And similarly, we must not let our Durkheim friends and adversaries argue as if these virtues would vanish off the earth if the position of women were changed. For, whatever their origin, they have become sufficiently common to both sexes for Buddhism and Christianity to have made chastity, mansuetude and unselfishness the basis of their ethical system, which means that even if women were to become spiritual facsimiles of men, they would still be exhorted to practise these virtues, or else that these virtues (as Nietzsche contends) are by no means so essential as M. Durkheim and other respectable sociologists take for granted. As it happens, Mrs. Stetson and I think that Buddha and Christ are nearer the truth in this matter than Nietzsche. But the qualities whose over-development in women is the evil result of "stagnation and regression" are not commended by either Buddha or Christ or Nietzsche, and cannot, without much strain, be considered as virtues by any one. They are, at least in their un-

desirable preponderance, a part of the heavy price which all the above-named virtues and desiderata have cost humanity in the past, a price which, in our opinion, humanity may as well stop paying in the future. Having, as I trust, made this point sufficiently clear, we may return to Mrs. Stetson's analysis of that price, and inquire what has the race lost through feminine regression and stagnation, however indispensable this neat pair of abstractions may have proved in their day.

The first answer which arises in the mind is naturally a direct one: the work which womankind might have accomplished during those hundreds and hundreds of years if she had not had a man to work for her; the work which might have been given by two halves of the human race, instead of being given by one only. But here again we have need for a *distinguo*, though not a casuistic one. The woman did do work throughout that time. Not merely the essential work, direct and indirect, of rearing a new generation and, in a measure, keeping up the acquired standard of civilisation; but also the work, less essential indeed to the race, which enabled the man not merely to seek for food away from the home, but also to be as idle as he required (or at least as he liked) while in it. The woman, save among the exceptionally wealthy, has always been the chief domestic servant; and even nowadays she is so, to a greater or lesser extent. The woman, therefore, has worked; but—and here comes the subtle distinction on which the whole economic and sociological part of the subject reposes—she has worked not for the consumption of the world at large,



and subject to the world's selection of good or bad, useful or useless, work ; but for the consumption of one man and subject to that one man's preferences. The woman has worked without thereby developing those qualities which competition has developed among male workers. She has not become as efficient a human being as her brothers ; whatever her individual inherited aptitudes (and, as Mrs. Stetson aptly reminds us, women are, after all, the children of men as well as of women, and must, therefore, inherit some of their father's natural powers), she has not been allowed to develop them in the struggle for life ; but has been condemned, on the contrary, to atrophy them in forms of labour which can require only the most common gifts, since they are required equally of every woman in every family. Let us repeat this fact : womankind has not acquired that degree of bodily, mental, and æsthetic efficiency which can result only from the competition of such qualities, and from that professional education which is itself a result of competition. This, please observe, is not the view only of Mrs. Stetson and the persons in favour of female emancipation. M. Durkheim's famous "stagnation and regression" of the female mind can mean only that women have become a great deal less competent than they either originally were, or than the favouring power of natural selection would have made them.

But this is by no means the whole of the price which the human race has had to pay for the needful "division of labour" between its two halves. Negatively, the position of women has prevented their developing certain of their possibilities ; positively, it has forced

them to develop certain other of their possibilities. It has atrophied the merely human faculties, which they possess rudimentarily in common with men : it has, on the other hand, hypertrophied the peculiarity which distinguished them from man : hypertrophied their sex. There is one particular sentence in "Women and Economists" which converted me to the cause of female emancipation : "Women are over-sexed."

## V

Women over-sexed ! *Over-sexed* ! There seems something odious and almost intolerable in that word. In the fact also—but odious and intolerable in a manner more subtle and more serious than mere scandalised modesty can ever understand. Let me try to explain the extreme importance of Mrs. Stetson's thought. *Over-sexed* does not mean over-much addicted to sexual indulgence ; very far from it, for that is the case not with women, but with men, of whom we do not say that they are *over-sexed*. What we mean by *over-sexed* is that, while men are a great many things besides being males—soldiers and sailors, tinkers and tailors, and all the rest of the nursery rhyme—women are, first and foremost, *females*, and then again females, and then—still more females. It is a case for paraphrasing Danton ; only that, alas ! there is a considerable difference between " *de l'audace, de l'audace et encore de l'audace*" and " *de la femme, de la femme, et encore de la femme*," which latter sums up the outspoken views of the Latin races, and the practice, alas ! of the less

outspoken but more practical Teutonic ones. And here we touch the full mischief. That women are *over-sexed* means that, instead of depending upon their intelligence, their strength, endurance, and honesty, they depend mainly upon their sex; that they appeal to men, dominate men through the fact of their sex; that (if the foregoing seems an exaggeration) they are economically supported by men because they are wanted as wives and mothers of children—that is to say, wanted for their sex. And it means, therefore, by a fearful irony, that the half of humanity which is constitutionally (and by the bare fact of motherhood) more chaste, less dominated by sexual impulses and thoughts, has unconsciously, and all the more inevitably, acquired its power, secured its livelihood, by making the other half of humanity less chaste, by appealing through every means, material, æsthetic and imaginative, sensual or sentimental, to those already excessive impulses and thoughts of sex. The woman has appealed to the man, not as other men appeal to him, as a comrade, a competitor, a fellow-citizen, or an open enemy of different nationality, creed, or class; but as a possible wife, as a female.

This has been a cause of weakness and degradation to the man; a “fall,” like that of Adam; and, in those countries where literature is thoroughly outspoken, man, like Adam, has thrown the blame on Eve, as the instrument of the Devil. I am not alluding to the Fathers of the Church or to ascetic writers; but to the essayists, novelists, and dramatists who have taken their place in modern life, and who have merely restated, in language less allegorical, but by no means

more polite, the legend, or rather, alas ! the sociological fact, of the death and damnation of man's soul through woman.

This is, of course, particularly the case among our Continental neighbours, more outspoken than we upon all sexual questions, and unhampered by the thought of Thackeray's Erubescant Young Person. The old, old story is repeated with slight variations from Schopenhauer to Nietzsche, and from Michelet to Dumas *fils*. I think it may be studied best in the works of this really very humanitarian though exceedingly amusing dramatist.

"Well, then," asks Mme. Leverdet in his "Ami des Femmes," "what conclusion have you come to as a result of your studies of womankind? You needn't mind telling me, for I am a *femme d'esprit*."

"My conclusion," answers De Ryons, the "Ami des Femmes"—"my conclusion is that Woman, such as she exists at present, is a creature entirely illogical, inferior, and harmful—'*un être illogique, subalterne et malfaisant*.'"

- The admirable preface of the play, and the whole tenor of the author's works, show that the younger Dumas is making use of the personage of De Ryons to speak his own innermost convictions, and that these are the convictions of a very sincere and very disheartened moralist. As such, they are well worthy of our attention; and—in the light of Mrs. Stetson's words, "Women are over-sexed"—ought to carry more weight than a whole cargo of "Woman Question" pamphlets. In the first place, Dumas *fils* is rebelling, with the mixed cynicism and enthusiasm of his moralist's

nature, against the poetical lie, covering so much ugly prose, that "Love is enough." Rebelling, that is to say, against the narrowing of that great word *love* down to a single one of its possible meanings ; rebelling against the notion that the power of loving, of giving one's self, body and soul, which is necessary for the efficacy and dignity of all human labour,<sup>6</sup> of all human relationship, should be expended solely in the passion of a man for a woman. He sees and he preaches how small a part sex has a right to play in this big and complex world, how episodic a part in this wide and varied human life. And he sees that the danger and the evil come from what we have learned to call the over-sexed woman, but which he calls, like every Frenchman, merely *La Femme*.

For he is himself that *Femme's* first and foremost victim ; he is hag-ridden by that fearful neo-Latin abstraction as in an inevitable reality. Similar in this to so very different a man as Michelet, Dumas describes *La Femme* as if she were a single and invariable type, and, moreover, also the type of a disease. It is altogether impossible to translate into English the particular words which either Michelet or Dumas (I forget which) has coined as expressive of the intimate nature of womankind. But in another place Michelet defines the object of his love and pity, of his very honest "*Frauendienst*"—as "*la femme, toujours faible et souvent furieuse*"—while Dumas has a less medical and much more amusing formula : "*Ces charmants et terribles petits carnivores pour lesquels on se déshonore, on se ruine, on se tue, et dont l'unique préoccupation, au milieu de ce carnage universel, est*

de s'habiller tantôt comme des parapluies et tantôt comme des sonnettes."

Dumas, however, is not inferior to Michelet in physiological lore, particularly of the kind offered to the world by men of science rather hungry than scrupulous. In this preface of "*L'Ami des Femmes*," we have a list of all the possible varieties of *La Femme*, with inventories of her peculiarities, from the lines in her hands to the shape and consistence of her calves, let alone the smoothness or crispness of hair, the flatness or sharpness of nose, the skin which is either always warm or always cold, and those curious olfactory details which prove that, so far as French writers are concerned, it is quite untrue that genus *homo* is inferior to the canine race in the faculty of scent. Physiologically and sociologically, Dumas believes unhesitatingly in the existence of *La Femme*. And believing in her as such, he sees in her a horrible danger to man's moral progress; he sees her attack him, grapple with him, destroy him, in her capacity not of human being, of competitor, of enemy, but in her capacity of woman, of mistress or wife. Against this danger man must eternally struggle; the creature made in God's image must be saved from this diseased piece of its own flesh. Man must diminish the power of woman by diminishing his own sensuality and folly. One feels all through this laughing cynicism a sort of priestly rage at the impossibility of finding out some better mode of continuing the race, at the impossibility of thoroughly getting rid of this constant disgrace and danger.

Meanwhile, there women are, and the only thing is

to be exceedingly wise and consistent and austere with them ; not to be unjust or angry with their miserable nature, which is not any fault of theirs. Besides, and that is the worst of it, these sirens, these man-destroying monsters, do everything to make themselves agreeable ; these dangerous wild beasts are, alas ! charming.

## VI

All this is, you will answer, mere literary exaggeration. There have been an enormous number of most useful women in the world, Mrs. Fry, Queen Elizabeth, Joan of Arc, the mother of the Gracchi ; and, as a fact, it is these selfsame Latin countries, with all their filthy talk about *La Femme*, her ailments and powers, who bore us Anglo-Saxons almost equally with their talk about the miraculous virtues of *La Mère*, who is, after all, only *La Femme* . . . well, as the Latins would put it, when she is too old or too busy to be *La Femme*.

Doubtless. And it is not "Women and Economics," nor I, its converted expounder, who give so inordinate an importance to the influence of the over-sexed woman upon the moral cleanness, the chastity, of mankind ; it is the very people, like Dumas, who believe, which we do not, in the universal existence and eternal duration of *La Femme*.

Mrs. Stetson has mentioned this aspect of the question, and I have followed her example, because it is certainly an important one. But Mrs. Stetson has

taught me to see that there is another aspect, more important by far. The fostering of vices, especially of vices so harmful to the race as those presided over by *La Femme*, is a very grave mischief; but vices, from their vicious nature, are more or less exceptional and tend to die out. And a far more serious evil consists in the wasting and perverting of virtues, the systematic misapplication of healthy feelings and energies. Now the chief point made by the author of "Women and Economics," the point which, as it converted myself, ought to convert many others from indifference to the Woman Question, is concerned with the misapplication and waste of the productive energies and generous impulses of men, thanks to the necessity of providing not only for themselves and their offspring, but for a woman who has been brought up not as a citizen, but as a parasite, not as a comrade, but as a servant, or—well, consider the word even in its most sentimental and honourable sense—as a lover. The economic dependence of women (however inevitable and useful in the past) has not merely limited the amount of productive bodily and mental work at the disposal of the community, but it has very seriously increased the mal-distribution of that work and of its products by creating, within the community, a system of units of virtuous egoism, a network of virtuous rapacity which has made the supposed organic social whole a mere gigantic delusion. Virtuous egoism, and virtuous rapacity; for *it is* virtuous on the man's part, husband or intending husband, to sacrifice himself for another human being; and the consciousness of the virtue enables the sacrifice to be extended, with a clear con-



science, to the interests of the community at large. A man has to be first a good father and husband, and only afterwards, with such honesty as remains over, a good citizen.

"Such honesty as remains over! Sacrifice of the community to the wife and children!" you exclaim. "Why, this accusation of yours against the modern man and the modern woman is far more really dreadful than any of that French rubbish about *La Femme* and her victims!" Exactly so; and a great deal more important, because it is a great deal truer and more sweeping. The very fact of its truth not being recognised merely goes to prove how extraordinarily our moral sense in economic matters has been perverted (or has failed to grow), owing to the fact of the man having to supply the material wants and satisfy the caprices not only of himself, but of that "better"—or worse—self who sees the world only through his eyes, and damages the world only through his hands. It is not a question of cheating or robbing. I am not a collectivist; I believe no more in the rights of labour than in the rights of property; and I have no reason for supposing that the author of "Women and Economics" does so either. People's moral obtuseness is, on the contrary, proved irrefutably by their always connecting the idea of dishonesty with such narrow and crass categories as cheating and robbery—cheating and robbery which can be practised only against individuals, and on very rare occasions; besides being severely, perhaps almost too severely, punished. What cannot be punished (but is on the contrary praised and admired, when successful) is exactly the chronic and

all-pervading preference of the interest of the individual as against the interest of the community, the debasing of the standard of work and the quality of products. Now, this kind of dishonesty triumphs not merely in commerce and industry (perhaps almost least there, where most visible), but in all the professions which are exercised, and in many cases (bureaucracies of all kinds, civil and ecclesiastic, and who shall say how large a portion of our supposed necessary military system ?) are kept in useless existence merely because men have to make a living. "*Je n'en vois pas la nécessité*" : the minister might make that simple answer to the unmarried parasite, office-seeker, or journalist, or whatever he was ; but no minister, however cynical, would dare to question the married man's right—nay, his duty—to support his wife and family, or, more strictly, his wife.

I repeat : *more strictly his wife* ; because it is, in reality, not the unborn children, or even the born children, who decide the "standard of living" ; but the wife, extremely on the spot, and already accustomed both to a certain degree of expenditure as a reality, and, what is quite as important, to a certain expenditure as an ideal in the future. Even the poorest paupers contrive to rear offspring ; and, by a melancholy irony, the greater part of the world's most necessary work happens to be done by people "whose dear papa was poor," as Stevenson makes the good little boy express it. No, no, it is not the children who ask for carriage horses, toilettes, and footmen, or (in more sordid spheres) for the Ibsenian "home for happy people," with its one overworked drudge and

its preoccupation about the husband's dinner. It is not even the children who clamour for nurse-maids and governesses and expensive schools: it is the wife.

## VII

"*Tout cela a été fait pour casser,*" remarks Nana, after one of her bouts of destruction. Reputable women do not, usually, while away a dull morning like Zola's ingenuous courtesan; they do not set to tearing and smashing. But the only difference, very often, is that while the light lady destroyed in a couple of hours the product of many men's and many months' labour, the virtuous woman of the well-to-do classes, and of the classes (more numerous and important) aspiring or pretending to such well-to-do-ness, alters, discards, throws away more gradually those objects which are no longer consonant with "what one *has* to have," and whose continued use would therefore suggest the horrid thought that the family was not really well-off; in eminently business countries the thought that the husband's *business* was not thriving. "It is good for trade," remark the more responsible among these ladies, unconsciously echoing a reflexion of that same Nana. It is good for trade: and so is a town being burnt down, or swallowed up by an earthquake, or washed away by a tidal wave. It makes room for more objects (dresses, crockery, furniture, houses, or human beings); but, meanwhile, you have wasted those that were already there, and all the labour and capital they have cost to produce.

But the spirit of wastefulness is by no means the worst co-relative among women of the spirit of rapacity, of "getting wealth, not making it," as Mrs. Stetson luminously describes it, which the economic dependence of the wife develops (as a virtue, too!) in the husband. An enormous amount of the hardness in bargaining, the readiness to take advantage, the willingness to use debasing methods (such as our modern hypnotising advertisement system), the wholesale acceptance of intellectual and moral, if not material, adulteration of work and its products—corresponds in the husband to what is honoured as thrift, as *good management*, in the wife. It is more than probable that the time wasted, the bad covetousness excited, the futile ingenuity exercised by the women who crowd round the windows of our great shops and attend their odious "sales," are really the result of a perverted possibility of virtue.

For the man's virtue is to *make money*; the woman's virtue is to *make money go a long way*. And, between the two virtues, we are continually told that a business house cannot give better wages and shorter hours because it would be "crowded out of the market"; and we are told also, by more solemn moralists still, that nations cannot do without war, lest they lose their "commercial outlets," or fail to secure those they have not yet got.

Who can object? All these people are good husbands and good wives; the home is the pivot of our morality. And the most disheartening thing is, that all this is true.

## VIII

How do you propose to remedy it? By what arrangements do you expect to make the wife the economic equal of her husband, the joint citizen of the community?

I propose nothing, because I do not know. All I feel sure of is, that if people only want a change sufficiently strongly and persistently, that change will work out its means in one way or another. Which way? is a question often unanswerable, because the practical detail depends upon other practical details which the continuance of the present state of things is hiding from us, or even forbidding. And because, moreover, we are surrounded on all sides by resources which become available only in connection with other resources, and only under the synthetic power of desire. The lids of boiling kettles went on rising all through Antiquity and the Middle Ages; but the notion of using that expansive movement of steam could not occur until people had already got roads and mariners' compass and mechanical mills, and until people were beginning to find stage-coaches and sailing vessels and wind-mills and water-mills a little unsatisfactory. The integration of women as *direct* economic, and therefore *direct* moral and civic, factors in the community, is not a more difficult question than the question of the integration of the labouring classes into the real life of nations; and yet the "social question" will find, some day, its unexpected solution; and the "Woman

Question" will, very likely, have to be settled before that.

Have to be settled? I would have said "settle itself," for that is more like my meaning, if it were not that I wish to insist that questions do not *settle themselves* satisfactorily, unless we wish and help them to do so. It is for the sake of such increase of wish for a change in the economic position of women, or, at all events, a diminution of the present very strong prejudice against such a change, that the discussion of ways and means appears, to me at least, principally useful. I do not agree with Mrs. Stetson's suggestion of our eventually living in a kind of hotel, or at least dining permanently in a restaurant; but the discussion of such a plan, odious as it appears to me, is infinitely useful in accustoming us to the thought that some arrangement will require to be devised for delivering women from the necessities of housekeeping. I see some similar usefulness even in discussions about the future of women (including the possibility of that famous "third sex" which haunts the imagination of the Latin believers in *La Femme*), such as I. H. Rosny has introduced (I scarcely know whether as a joke or not) into his "Chemin d'Amour." All these speculations, serious or frivolous, enthusiastic or cynical, serve to plough up the solid, sterile ground of our prejudices, and to expose our thoughts and feelings to the fertilising influences of time and chance.

Besides this fact, the one thing certain about the future of women is, surely, that they ought to be given, by the removal of legal and professional disabilities, a

chance, if not of becoming different from what they have been, at all events of showing what they really are. For one of the paradoxes of this most paradoxical question is precisely that, with all our literature about *La Femme*, and all our violent discussions, economical, physiological, psychological, sociological (each deciding according to some hypothesis of his immature science), as to what women must or must not be allowed to do, and what women must and must not succeed or fail in—we do not really know what women are. Women, so to speak, as a natural product, as distinguished from women as a creation of men; for women, hitherto, have been as much a creation of men as the grafted fruit tree, the milch cow, or the gelding who spends six hours in pulling a carriage, and the rest of the twenty-four standing in a stable. Very excellent things, no doubt, and a great deal more useful and agreeable to man than a bitter-berried thorn, or a she-buffalo, or a wild horse of the pampas; but scarcely allowing us to judge, by what they at present are, of what their species must eternally and necessarily be.

One of the very great uses of Mrs. Stetson's most useful book is to accustom those who *can* think, to think in terms of change, of adaptation, of evolution; to free us from the superstition that the present is the type of the eternal, and that our preferences of to-day are what decide the fate of the universe. *Woman*—even letting alone *La Femme*—is, so to speak, the last scientific survival of the pre-Darwinian belief in the invariability of types; *Woman*, I may add, is almost a relic of the philosophy of the Middle

Ages ; for has not *Woman* an *Essence*, something quite apart from herself, an essence like the "*virtus dormitiva*" of opium (not always so tranquilising), an essential quality of being—well—being a woman ?

One word more. There is a notion, founded in the main on the facts of a period of struggle, segregation of interests, and general uncomfortable transition, that if women attain legal and economic independence, if they get to live, bodily and intellectually and socially, a life more similar, I might say more symmetrical, to that of men, they will necessarily become—let us put it plainly, less attractive to possible husbands. Of course, if they have changed, they will no longer realise the ideal of gracefulness, beauty, and loveliness of the particular men who like them just as they are ; but then those particular men will themselves probably no longer exist. Moreover, there is, undoubtedly, a certain co-relation between the qualities of the two sexes, due to the fact, which we are all of us (not only M. Durkheim with his "division of labour") inclined to forget, namely, that the woman is, after all, not merely the *wife* (since that noble word must be put to such mean use) of the man, but also his daughter, his sister, and his companion ; and that, as such, he requires her to be not *unlike*, but *like* himself. There is, if we watch for it, a family resemblance, after all, between the men and women of the same country. I was very much struck, while at Tangier, by the fact that the husbands of those veiled and painted Moorish women were themselves so oddly like women in men's clothes, those languid Moors lolling in their shops,



with black beards which looked almost as if they had been gummed on to their delicate white faces: the ultra-feminine woman belonged, quite naturally, to the effeminate man. In a similar way, the "masculine" Englishwoman, fox-hunting, alp-climbing, boating, is the natural companion of the out-of-door, athletic, sporting, colonising Englishman; she has been taught by her big brothers during their holidays "*not to be a muff*"; she has learned to be ashamed of the things "the boys" would be ashamed of. And, living as I do equally among Latins and Anglo-Saxons, I have got to guess that, if the Latins see a "third sex" in a portion of Anglo-Saxon womankind, the Anglo-Saxons, on the other hand, have a vague but strong feeling that a corresponding category might be found among the Latin males morally emasculated by belief in *La Femme*. For if *manly* be an adjective denoting certain virtues, and *effeminate* an adjective denoting certain weaknesses, you may be sure that the same civilisation, the same habits and preferences, will produce more of the one than of the other in all the members of a race, just because they do belong to the same race. The man makes the woman, and the woman (as Dumas and the believers in *La Femme* are the first to tell us) in her turn makes the man; woman in the image of man, man in the image of woman.

And since I have used the word *image*, and have alluded to the grace and beauty, or the gracelessness and ugliness, of the women of the future, let me remind Mrs. Stetson's readers that it is just the most æsthetic, but also the most athletic and the most intellectual, people of the past which has left us those statues

of gods and goddesses in the presence of whose marvellous vigour and loveliness we are often in doubt whether to give the name of Apollo, or that of Athena.



## RUSKIN AS A REFORMER



## • RUSKIN AS A REFORMER

“ . . . Through such souls alone  
God, stooping, shows sufficient of His light  
For us i' the dark to rise by. . . .”

### I

COMING, as it did, when all England was engrossed by the tragic practicalities of the War, the death of Ruskin failed to bring home, as the death of every great master normally does, the full sense of what this man has done and can do for our more than momentary dignity and welfare. The case being such, it is better to come, as I do, when others have long since had their say ; since there is now hope of some attention from those whom I would try to bring back to a study of Ruskin, by enumerating some of the possibilities and habits of thought and feeling which I am myself aware of owing, at least in definite and imperious form, to the teachings of this great prophet of righteous happiness. And the attention I should most desire is that of the younger of my possible readers and those of most advanced opinions ; because I am convinced that, far-spreading

as was his influence on his immediate contemporaries, and large as is the debt (though often second-hand and unacknowledged) due to him by the following generation, the very best of Ruskin's efficacy can be expected in the future : an efficacy more limited, perhaps, but more genuine and fruitful, unhelpt, but unmarred also, by community of prejudice and error, and founded solely and safely on similarity of feeling and of aspiration. For the intuitions of Ruskin's many-sided genius were recommended to the majority of his contemporaries—a majority larger than could really assimilate them—by the system of symbolical metaphysics and dogmatic morals in which he set them with so tedious an ingenuity ; but our modern habits of thought have reduced this artificial framework to little more than a dreary litter, which wearies and vexes at every step. It is, therefore, high time to point out the genuine, though unconscious, organic system which unifies all that is living and fruitful in Ruskin's work, the vital synthesis of one of the richest and noblest and really best balanced of creative personalities.

More essentially than almost any other illustrious writer, Ruskin has been a giver of great gifts. He has opened out to us many and various fields of æsthetic and imaginative enjoyment, which we can sum up under a number of rough headings—Turner, Gothic, the Alps, Venice, Mediæval Painting, Imaginative Topography, certain Botanical and Geological Interests, and many of the most essential and also the most recondite qualities of art ; and he has, with the unerringness of unconscious instinct, united them

all in a scheme of living, nay, rather of feeling and facing life, which is the spontaneous outcome of his character—the very flesh and blood of his soul given us to partake of. Moreover, this attitude towards life (higher than Goethe's or Carlyle's, more complete than Wordsworth's or Renan's, more human than Spinoza's or Emerson's) has the active, and at the same time contemplative, satisfactoriness of being in the widest sense religious; how truly so those best can judge who will strip away the mere ecclesiastical symbolism and theological metaphysics from Ruskin's genuine and spontaneous thought. Religious, in his detachment from all material possession or social vanity, his capacity to take of things only their spiritual use, their ideal fruition; religious, in his desire for union with all creatures through gentleness and sharing; religious, above all, in his passionate power of communion with all the universe through love and wonder. No writer has felt more strongly the spiritual man's disgust with the narrow utilitarianism (not Bentham's nor Mill's, truly) which looks upon the world as so much food and fuel, hides and wool; and no writer (not even Tolstoi) has felt greater wrath at the exploitation of human beings by other human beings. In the same way that men were sacred in Ruskin's eyes, so also was the visible and sensible universe; because he felt (expressing his feeling in the formulas of God's works and God's children) that both the universe and man should stand in relationship of spirituality with the spiritual human being.



## II

This leads me to begin what must needs be a very rough-and-ready enumeration of Ruskin's many and many-sided achievements, by protesting against the common belief, shared in dogmatic moments by himself, that Ruskin was unable to sympathise with progress and was hostile to everything modern. His early education made him, indeed, impervious to many sides of science, and he had neither time nor disposition to exchange the theological notions he had received ready-made for any kind of philosophy. But the progress which Ruskin sneered at and the modernness which he anathematised were, after all, the very same which distressed and disgusted so different a man as Renan—progress which considered science merely as an instrument for commercial production, or, at best, for sanitary improvement, and modernness which regarded philosophical thought as a useful solvent of inconvenient spiritualities. We must remember that "modern" meant for Ruskin, not our latter-day habits of mind, already full of sympathy with the past and impatience of the present and tinged so deeply with reluctance and regret, but the mental habits, if "mental" they might be called, of the second and third quarters of the nineteenth century; of that period of chaotic materialism, of hand to mouth ruthless egoism, against which not only Carlyle came to protest, but Karl Marx also. The wrath of Ruskin forestalled, despite exaggeration and dogmatism, a way of feeling which the scientific

and philosophical development of our day, nay, even the increased habit of material welfare, will make more and more usual in the future.

Moreover, I would point out that Ruskin showed equal abhorrence for what is the very reverse of modern and of progress, the brutish neglect of the beautiful work of the past, the disrespect for Nature's fruitfulness and cleanness resulting from centuries of sloth and barbarism, such as he saw it in Italy, in France, and in the Canton Valais. The diseased newness of Leeds or Manchester and the diseased decay of Venice or Verona affected him, equally, as the desecration of the soul's sanctuary. And the deeper science, the wider practicality, of coming times will justify the noble priestly wrath he experienced. But my meaning about this will become clearer, and Ruskin's meaning also, in the course of enumerating a few of the interests he brought into life, and then of summing up his attitude towards life as a whole.

### III

And to begin with art.

The action of Ruskin has been to break down all narrow dilettanteism, even of men like Wincklemann and Reynolds, and show that art was sprung from daily life and fit for daily life's consumption. Without ever belittling (as was the fashion in those days of Buckle and Taine) that creative genius which is the flower of one epoch but also the seed of another, Ruskin insisted on the participation of the humblest

skill and sentiment in all the great work of the past ; and indicated clearly, even if he did not formulate, that masterpieces owed the spontaneous appreciation which they got to the existence of artistic forms and qualities like their own in the commonest household objects. Moreover, while teaching his reader to take interest in the constructive reason<sup>o</sup> of all architecture, Ruskin went far beyond considering this constructive reason as the essential of architectural beauty. The passages in the "Seven Lamps," and elsewhere, on the evidences of living interest, of seemingly capricious but in reality instinctively meaningful alteration of proportions and relations of line, curve, mass and surface, forestall to my mind one of the most important discoveries which scientific æsthetics will have some day to register.

And here I would point out that, in order to get Ruskin's full meaning, we must never separate his writings from those wonderful illustrations which tell us all the things words can never say. It is in them that he has given us the real quality of mediæval architecture. Nay, more than that ; he has given us, in his rendering of balcony and window tracery, of the pine-cone brickwork of steeples, of the feathery keenness of lance-like ironwork, not merely the æsthetic loveliness, but also the imaginative fascination, of Venice and Verona. Think how even Goethe saw those towns, and how *we* see them. Well, the difference is due, two-thirds, to Ruskin. Similarly with the Alps. Look at his drawings, in "Modern Painters," of the Mont Blanc range. These things make one forevermore feel the uplifting, the bud-

ding of clustered peaks, the sweep of moraine and avalanche tracks, the cling of forests, and add to the reality the charm of *his* having seen and felt it.

Ruskin gave us one of our greatest pleasures (gave it consciously and as an artistic factor in life)—topography; teaching us to feel the countries growing, forming, as we move through them; teaching us to evoke the haunting presence of scenery, on dreary days or evenings, over maps; the very names of stations growing delightful, and a talk about miles and levels and surveyors' details becoming fraught with delight, a poem.

This art of getting the imaginative essence of things, of combining the mysterious associations, subtle, microscopic, between lovelinesses of all kinds, between all evidences of noble life, which Ruskin gave us, enabled him also to point out the real literary quality which great paintings (Turner's, for instance, in the "Loire side" and "St. Gothard") got by mere selection of visible items. Nor must we think of Ruskin's analyses of these pictures as mere ingenious exercises like those first taught by Lessing, which distract the mind from real artistic quality. What Ruskin taught on the largest scale and by unconscious system was, not to substitute the aims of one art for those of another, but to unite in our mind separate imaginative delights, actual and remembered, and to multiply them indefinitely by each other till the whole world became an organic unity, not by mere links of causality or category, but by the vivifying sense of love and wonder. Ruskin felt all things with the energy and complexity due to previous

feeling. The mere titles of chapters and illustrations ("Venga Medusa," "The Locks of Typhon," "The Sea Foundations") show his impressions to have been like tones rich in harmonics which are chords in themselves ; and many of his records of mere scientific observations seem to be throbbing with imaginative pleasure : the record, for instance, of how he calculated the erosion of a certain mountain, and that delightful statement, one of his most beautiful bits of writing, "the true high cirri never cross a mountain in Europe. How often have I hoped to see an Alp rising through and above their level-laid and rippled fields."

This culminates, perhaps, in the great chapter of "Modern Painters" on "The Use of Mountains" : to give motion to water, change to air and diversity to soil ; and we may add, after this chapter, to refresh, ennoble, and enlarge the soul of man. How in such passages as these Ruskin awakens our imaginative sympathy with the universe, teaching us to multiply, for instance, by the knowledge whence the great rivers come, the solemnity of the sight of them in defile or in estuary. What interest all this realisation of life brings into life ! Surely, he who should feel habitually as Ruskin teaches us to feel, merely in this one chapter, would be rich with the bare necessities, and certainly would want no amusements or excitements, even on a rainy day, knowing the snow to be falling, the brooks to be rushing, behind the mist on the mountains. Nay, he would have things to look forward to as others look forward to the newspaper or the theatre. What dramas are the skies preparing ? What pageants will be held at sunset ?

IV

Instead of which, we privileged folk . . . well, let us drop a veil over the futilities, the wasteful vanities, with which we cheat our tedious leisure, while the leisure, harder won, of our less fortunate brethren is employed, let us say, in reading betting news and accounts of murders and executions ; a vicious circle of overwork and idleness, of waste and lack of opportunity. Here, on the contrary, we are taught by Ruskin a virtuous circle of virtuous efficacy : intellectual and æsthetic interests being not merely wholesome and ennobling in themselves, but freeing us from the pursuit, often unjust, and always selfish, of superfluous materialities and wasteful vanities, liberating our minds and lives, and incidentally the lives and minds of others, from the grindstone. From the grindstone. This metaphor inevitably enters my mind with the remembrance of another passage of just such passionate imagination, in this same volume of "Modern Painters"—the description of Turner's "Wind Mill." "Turning round a couple of stones for the mere pulverisation of human food," he writes, "is not noble work for the winds." The half page gives the essence of Ruskin's philosophy, because it gives the whole of his strong harmonious mode of feeling. It does more than merely show the religious quality of Ruskin, which places him alongside of Isaiah, of St. Francis, and the great nameless makers of primæval myths, to whom the forces of nature are neither masters nor servants, but brethren, recreated

(as all things are recreated in the act of thought) in the image of man's own higher nature. It shows, also, his very noble and very original intuition of the comparative values of different kinds of work, his craving for such work as shall be fruitful, not merely for the belly but for the soul.

Some of us see the wind as a thing to grind corn, and the stream as a thing to spin cotton ; and we have, many of us, alas, from lazy conformity with the baser practicality of our time, grown almost to think that setting natural forces (even if polluted in so doing) thus to provide us food and clothing, is doing them a kind of honour, allowing them, mere soulless things, to share the life of creatures having minds, to wit, ourselves. Ruskin has shown (despite theology asserting that the world was made to be man's kitchen-garden) that our human life was worth participating in, that our human souls existed ("where a soul can be discerned") just in proportion as either employs Nature for something beyond preparing food or providing clothing. He has not been hoodwinked by fine phrases about "saving human labour." The labour is not saved if it is set merely to other work, as stupefying and as merely hand to mouth as that you took it from. There is gain only if, setting the winds to grind and the waters to spin, we set the men and women hitherto employed at loom or grindstone to watch the winds and streams, to feel their life and rejoice in it. There is gain even if, by reducing natural forces to drudgery, a certain proportion among us, having ceased to use our muscles for such purposes, employ our minds in thoughts of higher knowledge

and wider kindliness. But, in reality, we employ this privileged freedom of mind and time mainly to calculate how to get more out of the natural forces—more money out of their produce and more satisfactions of vanity out of the money. This passage forms a fit introduction to Ruskin's economical and socialistic views.

V

Economical and socialistic, in the sense neither of orthodox political economy nor of ordinary socialism, Ruskin's scheme, elaborated with little knowledge of economic science or of the discipline of science of any kind, strikes us at first as a hopeless jumble. He is an individualist, an opponent of collectivism. He has a theory of the intrinsic value of labour which seems to come out of some Marxian pamphlet; and, by its side, definitions of equitable exchange and summings up of the dependence of value on imaginative and emotional causes, which foreshadow the deepest analysis of Tarde's "*Logique Sociale*." But when we look at Ruskin's books on economy in the light of his other work, we find the clue through this confusion; and we rejoice that his lack of scientific training and his unbridled personal assertiveness have made him misconceive the very subject treated by other economists, and answer them so often at cross purposes. For, while the followers of Mill or Marx have amply furnished us with treatises (more or less logical and more or less narrow-minded) on the question of how and by whom wealth is really produced,



*Ruskin, following only his passionate human sense,* has given us what is wholly different : a theory how wealth ought to be spent. *This way of looking at the subject* (notwithstanding some wrong-headedness and much quibbling) enlarges and corrects political economy even on the mere scientific side, introducing the consideration of factors such as 'are nowadays beginning to sweep away the recent notions of "historical materialism," and setting the question of productive and unproductive labour in a more perfect manner than any other writer on economics, orthodox or socialist, whom I know. I could quote twenty passages from the "Political Economy of Art" and from "Unto this Last" alone, which, were they taken to heart, would improve not only economic theory, as propounded in books, but economic practice as it enters into the life of every well-to-do man and woman. That national wealth is meaningless save as equivalent of national happiness ; that he who spends deals not with his money only, but with the mode of occupation, the present bodily and spiritual welfare, the future misery or comfort, of those his money sets to work ; that every object of luxury consumed without improvement to the consumers' bodily or spiritual efficiency, is so much human labour destroyed, and so much human life and happiness wasted ; that, in fact, there is as much morality or immorality in the mode of spending wealth as in that of acquiring it, and that every prosperous person is, however unconsciously, the honest or dishonest steward of his community ; these are the chief headings of Ruskin's political economy. These are the truths

which Ruskin has guessed in their main features and elaborated, with the unerring sight of deepest sympathy, in every kind of detail. And they are truths which, if we saw and felt them thoroughly, would, as I hinted, add a great new factor to all economic problems: the factor of moral and imaginative selection, of an *idée force* (in M. Fouillée's phrase) acting as an economic determinant.

## VI

I have spoken of moral and imaginative preference. I ought to have added, to do justice to Ruskin's special genius, "and æsthetic." For it seems to me that Ruskin shows, in his own person, that such aspirations after justice, kindness and simplicity of life are the result of a wide sweep of imagination, which feels distant evil as discordant with good at hand; and, even more, of that habit of harmony, that craving for contemplative satisfaction, which make up the æsthetic nature. I have insisted on the importance of this æsthetic side for an even weightier reason: that a belief in it is the deepest basis of Ruskin's hopes for social improvement. Increased sympathy and self-restraint, usually the only factors thereof which moralists take into consideration, are thought of (or rather *felt*) by Ruskin as the means of substituting the interests and pleasures of the imagination for the exorbitant interests and pleasures of sensuality, of vanity or of acquisitiveness.

There would be food enough and shelter enough

and leisure in the world for every one, such is Ruskin's unformulated thought, if every one would be satisfied with such superfluous wealth, with such superior power, as is represented by the spiritual possession and spiritual multiplication of everything that is and can be beautiful. Like every great dream of universal happiness, Ruskin's conception of God's kingdom on earth is that of a kingdom of the spirit. "None of us yet know," he wrote in "The Eagle's Nest," "what fairy palaces we may build of beautiful thought, bright fancies, satisfied memories, noble histories, faithful sayings, treasure-houses of precious and restful thoughts, which care cannot disturb nor pain make gloomy, nor poverty take away." And the importance of the teaching of Ruskin is largely, as I said at the beginning, that he gave us not merely the conception of a higher, wider, less selfish and more active life, but that he gave us, in the unintended revelations of his own personality, the proof that such a life can actually be lived. No man, perhaps, has ever possessed so great a power of living in all the things which increase, instead of diminishing, by use and sharing; from the great mountain, whose image ennobled further the nobility of the buildings with which he connected it, as in the splendid Matterhorn passage in the "Stones of Venice," down to the rooms of the inn at Champagnole, where he "rejoiced the more in every pleasure *that it was not new*." I have chosen this illustration because it exemplifies what he was fond of preaching, the increasing fertility of all beautiful and noble things under the faithful tillage of our love.

Alas, such tillage is beyond the power of most men, and few, very few of us, ill-organised and unselected creatures, life's paupers or invalids, however rich in money or robust in body, can "see and possess royally," as Ruskin did, the spiritual kingdoms of the earth. Mankind at large, leisured and well-to-do, and even intellectually cultivated, has not the health or energy or staying power to live or wish to live in such a kingdom of the spirit. Even apart from sensuality, sloth or the weakling's need for excitement, we still require, for the most part, to be kept alive by Ibsen's "vital lies," ballasted by prejudice, stiffened into consistency by vanity, and tempted into activity by every lust and covetousness: and, as for the incentives of imaginative pleasure and higher sympathy, if we had only them, we should most of us die in the workhouse. We are not very highly evolved or well organised creatures so far. Ruskin could never realise this. And, on the whole, it is fortunate he could not, since, although it made him unjust and abusive where others would be merely self-contemptuous and hopelessly patient, it enabled him to fulfil his vocation as a great spiritual precursor. Every religion, in its noblest parts, is, after all, a *counsel of perfection*, ennobling and lastingly efficacious just in proportion as it can influence only the chosen few. And the highest ethical use of a religion is thus to influence, thus to select, the capable, and to produce in them a higher standard of capacity for those below to rise by. Ruskin's counsel of perfection is different from those we are accustomed to, but it is not, therefore, more far-fetched. It is not more unlikely that

mankind may some day seek its happiness in mountains, noble works of art, generous thoughts and all the sharable enjoyments called æsthetic, than that mankind will learn to love its neighbour like itself. It need not be more difficult to live in and by an inner harmony of one's soul, than to live in God : who knows, indeed, whether it would not be identically the same process ?

## VII

And now, before concluding my very rough-and-ready tribute of gratitude to Ruskin, this seems the right place to forestall another objection likely to be made both by believer and agnostic, that Ruskin, namely, could frame what has been called his religion of beauty, because he had the help, potent in reality or in delusion, of the other religion, the orthodox one, of which he is for ever talking. I am, on the contrary, struck more and more by the fact, that the dogmatic part of this religion not only masked from us much of the vital value of Ruskin's nature, but hampered him even more in some of his greatest, most natural conceptions : a materialistic and anthropomorphic philosophy, a cut - and - dried unpsychological ethic, elaborated in a comparatively ignorant and cruel past, and handed down, with every kind of misinterpretation and quibble, by minds deficient in all historical sense—this, which is the dogmatic part of every orthodox creed, could never help the religious reality of such a soul as Ruskin's. Like every great poetical mind, Ruskin's was naturally pantheistic ; not by dint of

metaphysical abstraction and the reduction of all differences to a uniformity of nothingness, but through the conception of all things in the terms of a pure and ardent human spirit. There is loving sympathy in his thought of the leaves gently making room for one another ; and tragic solemnity in that of the erosion, the gradual levelling away, of the great mountain. To him, as to St. Francis, as to Goethe and Shelley, such processes were not mechanical but archangelic. Here the creed in which he had been brought up interfered ; and instead of showing us nature as he felt it, desiring, loving, struggling, living, he was bound to explain it as a passive machinery in the hands of a manlike and capricious deity. I put aside his unceasing quibbling to explain the right or wrong of an artistic form, the superiority of a Gothic balustrade over a Palladian, the fineness of a rock by Turner and the wretchedness of a rock by Salvator Rosa, nay, questions of veneering and undercutting, by reference to the Decalogue, the Prophets or Deuteronomy. The very crudeness of these things renders them merely wearisome, but intellectually harmless. But this dogmatic belief actually warped Ruskin's thought and checked his spontaneous intentions.

No man was gifted with greater natural intuition of the organic, of affinity, growth, change, and all those harmonious complexities which we, remarking them, call "tendencies" in things ; yet he allowed himself to think only in terms of deliberate willing, ordering, arranging, rewarding, punishing, in terms of humanly devised machinery and wretched human jurisprudence. With his wonderful eye for everything

## RUSKIN AS A REFORMER

that told of life, he yet intellectually knew of only creation and its theological correlative, annihilation. How much finer would have been his historical conception of art, had he understood that the death (as he calls it) of a form of art is not a judgment from heaven, but a process which has its beneficent side, the possible preparation for a fresh living form. Nay, his habit of looking at the universe in a way not essentially different from that of Dante, had an even worse effect, depriving Ruskin, in a serious degree, of real hope in the future. The notion, the result of modern psychology from Spinoza and Kant downwards, that beauty is the name given to certain relations of proportion, visible or imaginative, in harmony with man's organic wants, this view, so really spiritual, because subjective, and corresponding so happily with that of moral fitness and its imperative, was one which naturally fitted in with Ruskin's æsthetic intuitions, with all his discoveries about form, composition and imaginative effect, and with his aspirations after a "spiritual kingdom" it harmonised so perfectly. But Ruskin believed that beauty was a sort of entity, put by the Creator into things, and which it is the duty of man thence to extract, and thinking thus, he naturally felt that the preference for inferior art was a form of wickedness, and that artistic appreciation must be taught to a stiff-necked generation by dint of an enormous amount of theological revilings. For, as I said before, the worst effect of his theological bias upon Ruskin is its depriving him of real faith, of hope in possible improvement. The idea of spontaneity, like the idea of evolution, is carefully

excluded by his dogmatism. Now, the discovery or invention of evolution has given us a habit of conceiving life as spontaneity and adaptation, above all, as unconscious, necessary improvement, instead of continual unquiet readjustment and effort of our little human will; and with it has come a kind of wider optimistic finality; or a possibility, humbly and hopefully, of doing without finality at all. It is instructive to compare with Ruskin's harassed feeling, that all will go wrong in the world unless it be converted to his notions, the hopeful serenity of even such a pessimist as Renan; the Frenchman's reassuring certainty, even in his plays and dialogues, that the moral world will live through every crisis, and that the good and evil we fight and mourn about are only our small human ways of looking at the movements of a universe which takes care of itself. Whereas, alas, the universe of Ruskin is (despite its singing streams and rejoicing mountains) inert, mechanical; a dead weight lugged about by a personal (and on the whole inefficient) creator, and requiring to be poked and scolded by Ruskin himself.

## VIII

And to sum up. When we have separated what Ruskin can give the future from what (unfortunately in the long run, though fortunately at the moment) Ruskin got foisted on him by the past, I think we shall see that in Ruskin, as in every other great prophet, the valuable, the efficacious element was, not what he intended to teach, but the personality, the type



*of human power in nature, which we feel through all his teachings. Ruskin's deliberate intention was to place Turner above Claude, Gothic above Renaissance, the Middle Ages above Modern Times, Hand Labour above Machinery, Protestantism above Catholicism, and Biblical interpretation above Scientific.* But this programme matters little, and soon will matter not at all, these questions sinking more and more into squabbles about definitions and crusades about names, the embodiment thereof in his work being marked by injustice, violence, sophistry, and self-contradiction. But, meanwhile, the real man, the organised, intuitive, unhesitating creature of perception and aspiration, has subdued all this to his unconscious purposes, and has left us the priceless teachings of his true preferences and antipathies. He has shown us art, history, nature, enlarged, transformed and glorified through the loving energy of his spirit. He has shown us a scheme of life in which greater justice for all would result merely from greater happiness of endowment of every one. He has given us an example of contemplative union with all living things, and in this contemplative ecstasy made all noble things alive. The most larklike soul of our time, he sings at heaven's gates, and his song makes heaven's gates be everywhere above us. Greatest of all his gifts, he has given us himself: himself unconscious of all the baser temptations which we struggle with, and absorbed in happy, fruitful thoughts and feelings, sharable with every free-born spirit.

His work, as I said before, is useless comparatively but positively supremely useful, because it is a counsel

of perfection ; and one might say, without exaggeration, that the highest meaning we can put into this ceaseless jostle of rapacities and vanities which we now call real life, would be the hope that the day may come when all mankind, or mankind's flower at least, will be permitted by circumstance and be enabled by endowment to seek their most natural happiness as this real man has really done.



ON MODERN UTOPIAS  
-  
AN OPEN LETTER TO H. G. WELLS



## ON MODERN UTOPIAS

### AN OPEN LETTER TO H. G. WELLS

**I**N placing your name at the head of a new book of my own, my motive is, naturally, to do myself credit while showing you honour. But I also seek an opportunity of conversing with you in that perfectly intimate manner so often prevented by our own shy or philistine personality, and possible only, perhaps, under the chaperonage of that most sympathising and unreal of all phantoms, the Reader.

Our talk, of course, will be about the most wonderful of all your inventions: the planet, twin of our earth, where (as Sterne already remarked about the Continent) things are better done than over here.

I have just been re-reading your "Utopia" and your "Anticipations"; and my thoughts are still in a prodigious welter, curdling into currents by no means easy to follow, and eddying round certain reefs, with or without beacons. One of these recurrent rocks is that against which our theological forefathers were perpetually breaking their logic, and to a certain extent their hearts: the question, if I may give it a name

formed by analogy, of *the Inefficacy of Grace*, the persistence of Sin and Punishment in the face of Redemption, the question why, since there was a royal road to Heaven, should so many souls go nevertheless to Hell? To you and me, and all who think like us, this self-same query recurs for ever in a garb of evolutionary philosophy : Why should progress be so *little progressive*? Why should Utopia be . . . well, only Utopia?

This is what your books make me ask myself ; whereunto, also, your books furnish at least an implicit answer, and it is about this mainly that I want to have a talk, because I find that we do not entirely agree. It is perhaps inevitable. You are—and that is the usefulness and delightfulness of you—a builder of Utopias ; and all Utopias, like all schemes of salvation, pivot upon an *if*. Every constructive reformer is ready to set all (or most) things right, providing only you will promise to obey him on one little point, or at least grant this point might have been otherwise. Thus : *if only* people would observe some particular law, or (as more recent prophets prefer,) disobey every law without distinction ; *if only* people would abolish private property, or disregard all selfish (or all unselfish and merciful) impulses ; *if only* they would be strictly communistic, or monogamic, or hygienic ; *if only* they would think less, or drink less, or have fewer children, or (saving your presence) have a few yards less of unnecessary intestine ; *if only* they would follow the dictates of Lycurgus, Cômte, Pope Pius X., Tolstoi, or Nietzsche—*then*, &c., &c., &c.—as if by magic. But so long as mankind obstinately (brutishly

of sentimentally or ignorantly, as the case may be) declines to accept the particular terms upon which the particular speaker has fixed his fancy, why, of course, all that mankind can possibly do will be mere vanity and vexation ; for nothing equals the critical acumen with which every other scheme of redemption is destroyed by each successive preacher of the *one thing needful*. Has not Mr. Bernard Shaw achieved his comic masterpiece in the proposal, following on the demonstration of the futility of all reforms, whether Whig, Radical, Collectivist, or Anarchist, that the efficiency of the citizen should be entrusted to an office for the breeding of human beings ?

But enough of such examples. Even without them, it is obvious that all Kingdoms of Heaven depend on an *IF*. The *if* of your particular Utopia, my dear Mr. Wells, is certainly the most easily admitted, if not the most easily granted, of all similar conditions ; because it is the least narrow and precise, and indeed is not so much expressed by yourself as perpetually suggested to the reader's own thoughts. This *if* of yours, this little bit of perfection required by you, as by all other utopists, as a starting-point for all improvement, can, however, be summed up in a few words, as follows : Progress might have been and might be far rapider and more secure, and the world a less wretched' and hopeless place for many folk, if the achievements of mankind had not been perpetually checked, deviated, or rendered nugatory, and its power of mind, heart, and will allowed in a considerable degree to run to waste. Thus, if I understand right, your Utopian planet beyond Sirius differs from its



twin world Earth exactly in so far as its past ~~was~~ escaped certain historical accidents which have slackened our progress ; as the seed of good has fallen less often on indifferent obduracy, or been gobbled up less certainly by self-interest and perfunctoriness ; as whatever germinating wisdom has not been choked by routine and prejudice. There has been less loss of time and effort and thought in Utopia ; that, take it all round, has been the difference between it and our poor Earth.

Such an explanation fits into our modern conception of Nature (in so far as Nature can be opposed to Man) as being eminently wasteful : millions of germs for one living organism, myriads of variations for one improvement. But even better does this explanation tally with the evidence of everyday life, of ingenuous thoughts become dead letter, fruitful rules grown to barren routines, preferences to prejudices, convictions to superstitions ; and individual talents, power good intentions, becoming not merely the paving-stones, but the very brick and mortar, of hell.

In your first chapter of "Anticipations" you have analysed how the coming together of the two inventions of the steam pump and the tram-rail, both applied to the old arrangements of the stage-coach, has bound us over to the intolerable stereotyped clumsiness of a railroad system. The chapter is a profoundly suggestive analysis of the deviation of *what might be* by *what is*. Such spoiling of new wine by old bottles was recognised long ago in the domain of conduct and character ; and half the novels written are unconscious essays on the ruin of powers for happiness and good by the institutions and arrangements made to secure good

and happiness in other times or for other persons : marriage, inheritance, education, profession ; all inventions which, when and where they do not help, inevitably impede.

And you yourself, in your very remarkable little essay called "Scepticism of the Instrument," have drawn attention to the intellectual loss due to the very forms of our speech and the categories of our thinking impoverishing and distorting all detail and reality to suit lopsided formulae. In short, nearly everything which serves a purpose is apt to become a nuisance ; and economy on one side implies, at least nine times in ten, waste of something on another. Wastefulness : everything under the sun (and probably inside the sun) is wastefulness. Such will have to be the burden of the latter-day Jesuites ; and in so far our latter-day Jesuitism is an improvement upon that of the Frenches of even more pessimistic and more wasteful times. But the lesson of history as well as of natural science is that wastefulness tends to diminish and consume itself ; and that, conversely, the obedience to purpose increases in all things just in proportion as a purpose forms itself and emerges out of the random lurchings and fumbings of the universe. But as yet purpose has but little to say ; and Wastefulness, which we call Chance, has the best of it. I have just alluded to the Parable of the Sower and the Seed ; it has an application wider than the one which British Infants are to be taught, denominationally or not denominationally, in or out of school hours : The seed falls on the highway and is trodden to mud by the passers-by, whom it might have fed ; the fowls of the air pick

it out of the furrow and devour it ; there are thousands of square miles of rock upon which it is parched, and millions of acres of thorns in which it is choked ; the only exaggeration in the whole allegory being the hundred-fold multiplication of the one little grain which chances upon good soil. "He that hath ears to hear let him hear," concludes the Master when he has set that forth. And we latter-day believers have heard the parable as a fair account of the ways of the Universe and of Man's poor efforts in their midst. Only, my dear Mr. Wells, there is a point which we are apt to overlook in this whole depressing story : the rocks and the thorns, the greedy pigeons, described as if they had come into being only to frustrate that well-meaning agriculturist, had been in that place long before the Sower himself ; nay, the grain existed long before he took it into his head to use it for bread and sow it in his furrows ; what he called barren soil was such only in the eyes of his hungry and hopeful effort ; what he called thorns or weeds were inferior to other plants merely because they did not afford him sustenance ; and the seed was wasted when it got into the crops of the birds only because he had intended that it should become bread for his belly. In other words, *wastefulness* is, as the Jesuit moralists would have said, a matter of *direction of the intention* ; and the things Man happens to require for sustenance of his body and soul are not necessarily the same which the universe intends producing ; nay, it may be man's self-engrossed imagination which attributes to the universe intentions of any sort. I have made this little digression in order to forestall from the first any accusation of pessimism,

particularly of that Schopenhauer type which holds that the universe (including its expression the *Wille*) is always interfering with Man's real interests, to wit, complete or partial self-annihilation. All that I mean is, that given that Man, with his sensitiveness to pain and consequent arrangements for trying to escape it, is merely one part, and a recently superadded part, of what we patronisingly designate as the Great Whole, there is no wonder in much of man's ingenuity and effort, like the seed of the parable, and from the Sower's point of view, being wasted. The matter for astonishment to me is rather how, despite the stones and brambles and thievish birds, there should already have come to be so many bushels of wheat and barley and oats, so many well-baked loaves, and even the most refined and least nourishing cakes, metaphorical *brioche*s, for instance, of art, sentiment, and ideal, such as that French princess proposed to offer people in years of famine. It is this view of things in general which, among other reasons, prevents my being much surprised, or even much discouraged, at our planet differing from its twin star Utopia.

But the indifference, construed by pessimists into hostility, of the Universe to man's rather tardy arrival and claims, is by no means the only reason for the slowness of his progress. As I have already hinted with reference to marriage, education, and similar useful encumbrances, it is man's own presence and his own requirements which are really most to blame in this unsatisfactory business.

He is, on the whole, paying the price of his own refuse-heaps. "Refuse-heaps!" exclaims the sanitary

reformer and patentee for wholesale Rubbish-into-Fuel-Conversion (half in Latin, of course, and half<sup>1</sup> in Greek): “and pray, why should there be any refuse-heaps at all?” Because the refuse-heap is the chief instrument by which all progress has been achieved: the refuse-heap called turn about *unfitness, failure, vice, sin, dishonour*, or merely *illegality*, on to which Natural Selection and Human Selection have for ever been throwing whatever, at any particular moment, happened to be in the way of their sweepings and garnishings; whatever, like the fossil which Thoreau flung out of his hermitage window, *was more bother than it was worth*. This rough-and-ready method has been, to say the least, expensive. Think of that destruction of possibilities! The variations suppressed for ever merely that one type should gain the preponderance needful for a few years! Why, early civilisation (and perhaps not so very early either) must have been a perpetual killing off of individuals too sensitive, too imaginative, too independent, too good, in fact, for patriarchal and military civilisations; even as, nowadays, individuals too good for strenuous commercialism find themselves discouraged in a quieter though equally crushing manner. And not only individuals have been exterminated, but in each survivor many a possibility sacrificed to a standard of necessary righteousness. Nay, every advance in morality has meant the sacrifice of all decent people who still clung to the practice, whatever it might be, which began to be branded as immoral; even as manslaughter and vendetta will become the exclusive privilege of “Born Criminals” with odd-shaped ears and a taste for tattooing (see

Lombroso) only by the vigorous destruction of all possible Othellos and Orestes, with whatever chivalry and heroism there may be in them.

Mr. Lester Ward and Mrs. Stetson have told us of an irreparable loss of time and opportunity accompanying the necessary subordination of the female to the male, and the passage from the matriarchal to the patriarchal state of society. What is a great deal more certain (though we blush to mention it) is the fearful waste of excellent qualities (of which we may judge by Aspasia, Mary Magdalene, poor Gretchen, and sundry humble or eminent ladies of our own acquaintance) which must have attended, and still attend, the needful segregation of the woman destined for motherhood from the woman whose sterile and dishonourable vocation has, after all, considerably helped the establishment of the lofty monogamic household. In fact, it is doubtful whether progress has lost more by incursions of barbarians and bouts of fanaticism than by the ruthlessness of its own slow and unintelligent methods. We do not like to teach this to our children, or even to admit it to ourselves; we should be glad—yes, even you and I, dear Mr. Wells, let alone the followers of Comte—if we could lay all such mischief at the door of wicked tyrants, and capitalists, and cunning priests (those “Bonzes,” “Fakirs,” and “Old Men of the Mountain,” who were such a comfort to eighteenth-century optimism), and blink the suspicion that *morality* has employed *immoral* methods, and progress cost some stagnation and regression. We are not yet spiritually strong and elastic enough to admit of moral instability and adaptation. We still require

the safety of sanctions, the corroboration of prejudices, the exhilaration of mutual anathema. On our fatiguing and puzzling journey towards recognition of realities we want to be comforted with what Ibsen's doctor calls "Vital Lies." And "Vital Lies," however indispensable for an individual, a class, or a period, are lies nevertheless, involving failure, catastrophe, or mere perfunctoriness; and as such they also are another instance of the wasteful system on which human progress is carried on. Wastefulness! Wastefulness everywhere, says the Preacher. The refuse-heap becomes indeed ever smaller and smaller, fewer useless things remaining to be thrown away, fewer useful things being thrown away with them; but the very process by which all this happens is wasteful itself. Nor is it surprising if the conscious spirit of man is thus wasteful, in however steadily decreasing a ratio, since it has arisen, after all, out of the unconscious automatism of the universe. And even as Pascal's Divinity could afford injustice because he had eternity to right it in, so the Forces of Nature can be dignified and patient because they are not flustered by pleasure and pain: why should they mind how long it takes to attain anything when very likely they do not want to attain anything at all?

Such considerations, I imagine you answering, may afford a metaphysical Lenten diet for the lay priests of progress, the responsible and busy *Samurai* of Utopia, during their yearly retreat among the polar ice-fields. But, practically speaking, Mankind is separate from all these cosmic forces. And seeing that Mankind is conscious of pleasure and pain, and consequently gifted

with foresight and volition, why the deuce should it not apply this foresight and volition to arranging a more tolerable earth? And here we are back, my dear builder of Utopias, at the original *if* of your whole system. For what has made the difference between your decent and decently happy planet and this Earth as seen from the top of a Strand omnibus has not been the accident of a war less or a discovery more, nor even the presence of a greater number of persons of virtue or talent, but simply that, in Utopia, people in general have been *less inexplicably stupid and lazy and heartless and self-indulgent* than here.

Less *inexplicably*. For I feel in all your anger and all your humorous sadness, even as in all the anathemas of all the prophets, the sting of the inexplicable : the human race is stiff-necked, obstinately blind to its own good. Now here it seems to me that you, like all the floaters of Kingdoms of Heaven, are distinctly unjust. The human race, I venture to say, has not shown, and does not show, itself one bit more stupid, heartless, lazy, or self-indulgent than you or I would in its place. There has been wastefulness on the part of the Forces of Nature, the Great Abstractions who are indifferent. But as to human beings, they have been applying their poor wits and will, under extremely trying circumstances, to their daily and hourly needs ; needs comprising rest and enjoyment (what we moralists call "sloth" and "self-indulgence") quite as much as the more obvious renovation of their tissues and replenishing of the race.

In so doing, like the famous savages of rhetoricians,



mankind frequently cuts down the tree for the fruit, and eats its corn as spinach ; it damages to-morrow, but it satisfies to-day ; and to-day is imperious. Mankind also damages its neighbour and posterity, but it satisfies (I must repeat it) the ego's immediate and cruel wants. Hence vice, crime and (more detrimental still in the long run) all the various perfunctorinesses and frauds which raise your indignation legitimately, but ought not (for you are a great novelist) to excite your astonishment—you who described the wiles of the hungry pseudo-writer who did poor Mr. and Mrs. Lewisham out of their typewriter's deposit. You are, for instance, angry that our schools should not be better adapted to the education of the young. But our schools (the one which educated Kipps, for instance) are perfectly adapted to their real vital object, namely, furnishing a livelihood to sundry genteel, incompetent moralists and scholars, and, on the other side, ridding parents and guardians of the harassing responsibility and presence of unruly youngsters. English people, less hypocritical because more practical than Latins, will even admit that seeming perfunctoriness is no drawback : Eton is useful in furnishing a lad with presentable future friends ; *Alma Mater*, with her *Schola Logica*, *Schola Mathematica*, *Schola Musica*, and other Faust-like inscriptions over Gothic doors, turns a boy into a man worthy of a latch-key. The simple truth was ingenuously put to this present writer by the youth who averred that Greek and Latin, doubtless Hellas and Imperial Rome, were useful "to pass exams." Half of our institutions, of our codes, morals, ideals, believe me, dear Mr. Wells, are useful

“to pass exams”; and exams are useful—well, in order not to have to pass any more.

Nor are the offences against progress always of this smug British type: in Southern countries (let us say) one is horrified by the suffering of galled and overladen horses; and one is forced to pick one's way and stop one's nose in the public street. But can we expect the miserable carter to be more careful (even if he had the money) of his harness than of his own ragged clothes, still less to unload half his freight and come back again, when his day's work and pay depends on doing that broiling journey a certain number of times? And where would you have the sluttish housewife throw her messes when she has no place save the convenient thoroughfare?

This illustration is, I fear, rather humble and repulsive. But the lives and souls of most folk are (and still more, have been) humble and repulsive: ill-fed, unwashed, untaught, often tired and nearly always hurried; so that one wonders how, even like those poor Southern peasants, mankind has yet been able to put by, year by year, more savings in the bank, and swell the capital of good.

“Il faut vivre, Monseigneur,” says the human race, like the jail-bird to the Minister. And you know, dear Mr. Wells, that you abhor the only answer possible to that, Schopenhauer's and the other pessimists'; you refuse to say, “Je n'en vois point la nécessité.” And meanwhile, living, because it has meant dying less soon and suffering less constantly, has slowly brought its remedy with it. The avoidance of pain and the snatching a scanty pleasure have been man's

real and sole business, with the consequence, as I have repeated too often, of much destruction, of much clogging and littering, but with the consequence also of constantly increasing order and forethought and self-control. For the lessening of our own discomfort forces a certain restraint on our neighbor ; the lessening of his discomfort a certain restraint on us ; foresight grows into imagination, imagination into sympathy ; appetite itself ends by teaching moderation, and self-defence, respect for others ; thus, as Professor Baldwin has shown us, the child, by gradually increasing perception of the outer world and increasing experience of other folk, grows at length into the adult citizen. You, yourself, dear Mr. Wells, have written a more convincing book than this "Modern Utopia," your book of "Anticipations," of how the world is likely to progress by the mere shifting and pushing of its short-sighted and selfish activities. We shall, even as we have, but with increasing speed, become more sound and sane, more leisurely and sensitive and thoughtful, as we become less poor and ignorant. Our added leisure and finer sensitiveness will enable us to do less mischief in seeking our good, and make us more dependent for our comfort on the comfort of others. Our cleaner, more ventilated fancy will sicken at whiffs from even distant refuse-heaps left by less squeamish and more hurried ancestors, refuse-heaps into which they swept what they could not deal with, and let it fester and breed disease, such as industrial exploitation, criminal justice, marriage laws, prostitution, and so forth, which we still accept as parts of public sanitation.

Quickly or slowly, man, asserting himself in the

universe, will diminish the universe's wastefulness. Quickly, say *you*, with your incomparable romancing ingenuity and intolerant novelist's sympathy; slowly, says your brother-thinker, Gabriel Tarde, with his historian's and economist's belief in strata of civilisation, in slow permeation or levelling up. But, quicker or slower, this automatic progress requires time; and it is time which you, in your "Modern Utopia," have suddenly taken to grudge. In thinking over the betterment which *must* come, you have (at least it seems to me) lost patience with the evil, the folly, and wastefulness under your eyes; and you have set to planning a royal road, to framing some device by which (as in some Monte Carlo "system") there will be all, or very nearly all, gain, and no loss to speak of. And you have invented a Utopia where time and experience are replaced by foresight and self-control; where forces for good shall no longer run to waste, and forces for evil be snuffed out by deliberate effort. There is already in the world an amazing amount of knowledge, of disinterestedness (at least as far as money and comfort goes), and of volition: let this be consciously applied to future improvement, no longer left to casual work, there are already a good number (perhaps there have always been) of superior men and women: let this *élite* direct the rest, showing its fitness to govern others, by its fitness to govern itself—and behold! we have your *Samurai*, your voluntary oligarchy, your noble caste, recruited by the elimination of all baser motives. The idea is so good that it is not new: the Pythagoreans, I am told, were people of this kind; the Jesuits, who did such wonders in

Paraguay, were men whose individual passions had been deviated and canalised *ad majorem Dei Gloriam*, although the God and the Glory were sometimes queer. And to me, who am, after all, but a poor æsthete in moralist's garb, there is about the whole thing a pleasant reminiscence of Mozartian choruses in the *Zauberflöte*, of a venerable, deep-voiced Sarastro, clad in white and singing eighteenth-century humanitarianism. The attractiveness of the notion, and its perpetual recurrence in some shape or other, suggests that there may be truth at the bottom of it ; at all events, that, by constant reverting to some such arrangement, mankind may eventually make it possible.

*Eventually*, but only eventually. For, and here one of my vague dissentient currents of thought finds a channel of expression, it seems to me that such a system of government by the wise and good is rather the result of the world's greater wisdom and goodness than its probable cause. Apart from such oligarchies of persons specially fit for military or statesmanly functions (but otherwise indifferent poor enough), like Sparta, or Venice, or the House of Lords at an unknown historical period, I can imagine such government by the Wise and Virtuous only in moments of emergency and crisis. In the very suggestive little Utopian novel, "*Histoire de Quatre Ans*," by my friend Daniel Halévy, for instance, the austere *élite* of men of science take the entire management of the human cattle remaining on earth, and even break and breed them, so to speak, for the plough. But this is after the collapse of society through the over-sudden introduction of virtually gratuitous chemical food and

consequent leisure, and a fine bout of mysterious pestilences which has purged the earth more effectually than Robespierre even could have done with purifying guillotines. And my friend Daniel Halévy does not say how the human cattle and their high-minded farmers got on in the long run ; nay, he even ends his tantalising story with an incursion of Tartars and a return of that "Great Corrector of Monstrous Times, Shaker of o'er-rank States, and Grand Decider of Dusty and Old Titles," the "Mars Armipotent" of splendid Fletcher's verse. And M. Renan, while (in his pessimist moment of the "Dialogues Philosophiques") furnishing a singularly terrible scheme of a world given over to the tender mercies of a scientific *élite*, has (like the charming, inconsistent, human, sly moralist he was) warned us in several other places against such oligarchies ; indeed, made it quite clear that, brute though Caliban often is, it is safer to leave the world to him than to the austere and philanthropic Prospero.

It might be possible perhaps, *with time* (of which, however, you are very chary !) to guard against the unpleasantness of your *Samurai Régime*, particularly by encouraging your other class of erratic (and I fear rather rowdy) creative geniuses. It might even (and to this I should propose devoting a little of our energy) become possible to diminish the trickiness and one-sidedness of superior people's individual constitution, and their tendency to rough-and-ready logic. But even if you get perfect disinterested thoughtfulness from a minority, do you really believe this disinterested thoughtfulness, immaculate, sound, but fitful, sporadic,

*and tentative, could build a world of virtue and wisdom out of the shoddy resolves, the sham comprehension, the genuine small self-seekingness and shirking of the majority?*

Why, we have not yet got the better of what is tricky and trashy in the individual saint or genius; and, as to disciples, every reformer has seen (or rather been too purblind to see) his teachings misunderstood or misapplied or turned into dead letter by those he trusted most. Did not the Apostles, under the eye of the Master, begin quarrelling for precedence?

The *Samurai*, therefore, may organise statistics and laboratories, but I doubt whether they will do much effective organisation of mankind at large. I venture, indeed, to think that their real use will be to organise *themselves*, I might almost say, each to organise himself and herself. Good, wise, and responsible people are never good, wise, or responsible enough or in the right directions and moments; and it will be a great gain to all progress if they be, personally and collectively, up to the mark, a thoroughly efficient moral and intellectual vanguard. It will be a gain if virtue and wisdom cease to be a positive nuisance. Let the *Samurai* educate and organise themselves and not others; if their systems of morals and education, their new scruples and new duties, their new ideals and dignities and pleasures, are really good for anything, why, then, this better born and better bred class will gradually be imitated by their inferiors; the world will rot a little less for their presence. They are the salt of the earth; let them see to not losing their savour!

To do this will give them work enough, to breed and educate their own children ; nay, one might almost say, to breed and educate their own individual thoughts and desires.

I am gradually working my way through that confusion of enthusiastic assent and ill-defined suspicion with which your "Modern Utopia" has filled me. And now I find that while wishing with all my heart for your well organised republic, while longing to become a knightly priest of progress, while hankering even for a little sound persecution of literary fops like your Bare-legged Nature-worshipper and your Sentimental Philistine with his Lady and his Dear Doggie ; while at all events accepting your religion of responsibility and foresight as the one my soul has ever yearned for ; while . . . well, while all this has been going on, something has murmured in my innermost ear, "Beware of a new perfunctory ritual, a new hypocrisy, a new intolerance ; beware of a new superstition——"

For this perpetual reaching out to the Future is a violation of Reality. Mankind has not bothered much about the Future because it has had its hands full with the Present. And mankind—such, at least, is my crass instinctive philosophy—*mankind has been right*. And what is more, you, dear Mr. Wells, know this far better than I, and have shown it with passionate pathos and humour in "Mr. Lewisham" and "Kipps" ; and it is only when you sit down to systematise and specialise the Future that you forget this living knowledge, as specialists and system-makers always forget all save the speciality and the system. The metaphysics



of your worship of the Future are, I venture to say, wrong; as wrong as those of any other priest preaching of any other Kingdom of Heaven.

. Life is not a single-aimed effort towards continuance and development, towards becoming somebody or something different. Seen through the scheme of the historian or biologist, its facts grouped and accentuated into his special intellectual pattern, life is a *ceaseless becoming*. But looked at, or rather felt, in a different way, life takes the signification of a *ceaseless being*; and as a *being*, not a *becoming*, does life affect the real creature and constitute real experience. Life (even the life of those Patriarchs who did nothing but be begotten and beget) is not merely procreation, but endurance; and if each individual were not busy making his own few years, nay, his own hour and minute, tolerable, the Race, for all its metaphorical powers of survival, would have died out a good while ago; nor would there be much talk of a future (on earth or off it) if there were not a most imperious present, full of ease and distress.

Even as theologians inventoried life according to the requirements of a day of judgment, so, particularly since Schopenhauer and Darwin, philosophers have taken in account only the qualities which, because they are useful, are perpetuated; and have denied utility to those which are not perpetual. Philosophers have fixed their eyes on the Will-to-Continue, belonging to that abstraction, the Race; and have neglected the Will-not-to-Suffer, belonging to the individual; a Will quite as important and a good deal more ascertainable.

For would there have been any human or animal action at all, any thought, any volition, any effort, any food, or any love, but for the fact of individual pain, discomfort, distress, and its poor younger sister, individual satisfaction? Would you, dear Mr. Wells, and your *Samurai* and *New-Republicans*, and your humble admirer myself—nay, a great many remarkable persons, saints, sages, John-a-Dreamses and Torquemadas of various ages and conditions—have all been busy with Utopias and Paradises and Hells, but for the pressure of that same Will-not-to-Suffer; but for the preferences, intellectual and sentimental yet organic, vicarious yet personal and present, of our own rather odd individuality, and sometimes rather to the inconvenience of our neighbours! Our neighbours, meanwhile, not saints nor sages, nor poets nor heroes, but just the normal philistines beloved of Dr. Nordau, have (as before remarked) furthered and hampered progress by their less peculiar attempts at making the present tolerable. All mankind, superior or inferior, has been busy keeping itself alive by material and metaphorical food and rest, and also by narcotics and stimulants. This latter fact has been a little blinked by utilitarians and moralists, so I wish to insist on it: yes, the human race might have come to an end but for satisfactions and alleviations which have sometimes cost degradation and disease and an increase of misery to themselves and their progeny. The excitement and the dreams of cruelty and superstition have helped to keep the race (because the individual) going, even like the excitement and dreams of alcohol and opium. And the world would be depopulated but for the fact

that human creatures have not merely begotten others, but kept their own vital hopes alive, thanks to the Gods' wholesale intoxicant called *Love*. You, dear Mr. Wells, with your *Lewishams* and *Kippes*, have brought home to your readers that those lovers, sheepishly ecstatic among the music-filled or moonlit bowers of, say, Folkestone Leas, are re-tempering their own soul, quite as much as replenishing the earth, in the one sort of poetry open to shopmen and housemaids, even as did the cave and lake dwellers, their ancestors. Indeed, you novelists may bring home to psychologists and sociologists and other rather dreary persons this great neglected cosmic fact : that human development depends not only on the warning power of pain, but on the restorative power of pleasure.

Now, thinking about Utopias and arranging for them is the born *Samurai's* pleasure, as similar thinking of God and Heaven and living for these has been the pleasure of the Saint.

Perhaps the most useful function of all religions (as distinguished from mere codes of conduct which have employed religious sanctions) has been thus to keep alive a certain number of religious people, who, but for the exhilaration of communion with a divinity and the corroborating peacefulness of a communion with fellow-worshippers, would have died for sheer misery and forlornness. Now, religious people have been, and are, a necessary factor in all progress, and only the more necessary for their scarcity.

Saintliness and heroism have perhaps done little direct good, perhaps done harm, practically and in the way they meant it ; they have not been, most likely,

half as fruitful of useful action as the selfish and thoughtless self-seekingness of grosser folk. But they have corrected, pruned, and lopped the instincts of life which otherwise ran to seed of death. There is more than an allegoric significance in chastity being the saintly quality above all others ; since chastity, in itself sterile, keeps the young brood, the quickening germ, from neglect, from devastation and death. A certain number must preach and live for altruism, not because altruism is a principle of life, but because the egoistic life-principles are too riotous and self-destructive. And as with thought of one's neighbour, so also with thought of that neighbour-in-time, the Future. The Future can exist only in the thought and feeling of the Present, as the Neighbour (in so far as Neighbour, as •ALTER) exists only in the thought and feeling of the Ego. Both are necessary mitigations of the actually existent, of the imperious *now* and the imperious *self* ; and both impose qualifications, sometimes prohibitions, on instincts and actions stronger, more vital and necessary, than themselves : " Not thus "—" Not so much "—"Not this at all." The thought of a *neighbour* is to make some *self* less miserable ; the thought of a future is to reclaim a possible present. And little by little, as the present becomes richer and the ego more complex, there will enter into the present more and more strands of the future ; and the ease and discomfort of the self will be shot and veined more and more subtly and indissolubly with the ease and discomfort of the neighbour. The dreams of the dreamers will slowly become reality. The chaste, sometimes sterile, saints will have bequeathed their features to the offspring of

the teeming, the forgotten fleshly generations; and that mystery will happen to which Renan has secretly and fearfully alluded: the Divinity will have been born of the prayers of its worshippers.

*In that Kingdom of Heaven there will be no saints; in the realised Utopia no Samurai; for saints imply sinners and Samurai imply uninitiate.* But meanwhile—and I return to my worship of the Present—there has to be a definite worship of the Future. “There are *Samurai* (with recognition in eyes and voice rather than in garb) needed to prevent progress being too perpetually wasted, but not, methinks, to organise it; tender-hearted *Samurai* physicians to check the birth of the unfit rather than to breed supermen on Mr. Shaw’s principles; sceptical *Samurai* moralists less to say “believe” and “obey” than to ask “are you quite sure?” and “try for yourself.” And such *Samurai*, in their serene but sometimes arduous and solitary efforts at (forgive what seems an anti-climax!) humbugging themselves and others as little as possible, will require a religion to keep them alive, a dreamed-of future to console them for the present. They will require a book like your adventures in the Twin-Planet beyond Sirius as an aid to devotion, a latter-day “Pilgrim’s Progress.”

I am aware, as I write these lines, that there is an air of *obscurantism* about them. I confess to a superstition in favour of the secret and monical ways of the Universe, and a perhaps mean-spirited fear of human pre-arrangement of all things; deeming, as I do, that our intellect, though vast, cannot yet compass the Multitudinous Unexpected; and that

what little intelligence and sympathy and will we possess is barely sufficient for everyday use and every day's unaccountable surprises.

Thoroughly earnest and strenuous people may stigmatise this attitude as *dilettanteish*; and I have a notion that they do not really like me. But I feel sure, dear Mr. Wells, that you will protect me against your *Samurai* and their presumable *Index Expurgatorius*; nay, that you will pull a few wires, in order that the revised edition of the *New Republican Breviary* should contain some little high-minded quotation from this over-garrulous letter of your devoted and grateful reader.



• A POSTSCRIPT ABOUT MR. WELLS





## A POSTSCRIPT ABOUT MR. WELLS

### I

I HAD intended the postscript should be about this book of mine, putting a thread of connection through these essays, and telling the reader, or at least the Reviewer, what it is all about. There were several things to explain, the title for instance, and what was meant by gospels and what was meant by anarchy. Such postscripts (and similar prefaces) are amusing enough to write, if not to read; with some of charm there must have been in the old-fashioned masked ball, where *bona fide* explanations were taken for mystifications and *vice versa*. Moreover, after a volume-full of studies of other people's philosophy, one feels inclined to air one's own a little, and talk about oneself. This postscript therefore was to have been about my own book, and not at all about that letter to Mr. Wells. And now instead. . . .

For Mr. Wells possesses the intolerable power (the more intolerable that I enjoy the abuse of it) of setting me off thinking anew when I have shaken down comfortably among my own ideas and do not

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want to hear any more of his. Thus, since printing that letter (in the *Fortnightly Review*) which was to have settled Mr. Wells and Utopias for good and all, so far, at least, as concerned myself, I have read the book on America, and am once more perplexed (and delighted) in my mind.

Perplexed on various points, which may be summed up thus: Can Mr. Wells be right and I be wrong? Is it possible that my obduracy about *Samurai* and *New Republicans*, about constructive socialism and the deliberate scheming out of the future, briefly, about the acceleration of progress by intentional effort, can this, my hardened incredulity, be the result merely of . . . well, let us say of my having been born under the sign of *Laissez Faire*, more precisely at the conjunction of Herbert Spencer and Buckle, moreover, in the darkest middle of the dark Nineteenth Century? Otherwise stated: is there really a change abroad, has the new century ushered in new relations between Thought and Practice which we, of the old time, cannot appreciate or even see? The supposition of being in the wrong is always annoying; and the worst of the matter is that I shall never know whether I am or not. For how can superannuated thought think itself out of date? So, like the inquisitive lover in that Tuscan folksong, I should like to die (but Mr. Wells also) a little temporary death, in order to see, not who would weep and who would laugh over our respective biers; but which of us two, Mr. Wells or I, is going to be regarded as the more delightfully quaint by retrospective readers of, let us say, the year Two Thousand.

The regrettable imperfections in the *Automatic Futuroscope* and the *Phonograph of the yet Unspoken* making it so far impossible to gratify this legitimate curiosity, I shall try and cheat my impatience by informing Future Ages and Mr. Wells what proposals I am willing to make for the benefit of posterity, and what improvements nice people of to-day might really attempt with a view to making the people of the future a good deal nicer than themselves. And in so doing I shall be explaining the title of this volume of essays, and what I mean by *gospels*, and what I mean by *anarchy*.

## II

No longer having a Personal Divinity to whom to devote our surplus moral energies, we many of us want to do something for the Future. We are beginning to substitute for the Grace before meat of our Fathers a less outspoken and less regular, but only the more sincere and efficacious little silent ceremony of thanksgiving whenever we become aware of something fortunate in our daily life. But not of thanksgiving only; there is a spice of fear, and, in consequence, a desire of atonement: Has not someone suffered in the production of this excellent food for body or soul? What of the midnight baker, the serf-ploughman? With what has the oven been heated, and the soil (we have heard of blood for such uses) been manured? The thought not merely of the present toil and want underlying our leisure and luxury,

but of all the past ruthlessness of law and custom which has brought about our morality, all this *is* apt to upset the balance of our satisfaction and to cause intermittent or steady impulses towards bringing our purer will, our clearer intelligence, as some sort of oblation. The evil of the Past shall be atoned for by the Good of the Future ! And, once more, we are becoming millenarians.

In this feeling, shared with all religiously minded rationalists of to-day, Mr. Wells and I are fraternally united. We both of us believe in a Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. The difference between us is, that while Mr. Wells would set Disinterested Thinking and Impersonal Feeling the task of actively and positively bringing about this millennium ; I should be satisfied with preparing such thought and emotion for service against the coming of the new dispensation, and my wildest hopes would be exceeded if such thought and emotion could cease to be a stumbling-block in the meantime.

In that letter of mine to Mr. H. G. Wells, I expressed my conviction that what small amount of civilisation mankind has hitherto achieved is due not so much to any intellectual and moral efforts, as to mankind's uneasy shifting of burdens and snatching at solaces ; in fact, not to the thought of the future but to the care for the present : a process of improvement unconscious and automatic like the Universe's other processes ; like them also in the highest degree wasteful and dilatory. And one of my reasons for this belief is that the bulk of the thinking and feeling intended to help on human improvement has really

not been good enough for the purpose. Not good enough in the sense of not sufficiently impersonal and disciplined.

This may seem odd, because the unpracticality of ninety-nine hundredths of all philosophical and religious thought and feeling has made people think that it is if anything too wise and too noble. As a matter of fact, however, in no other fields of human activity has unruly impulse raged with such impunity. For consider: in all practical relations of life the Old Adam of one man is kept within bounds by the Old Adam of another; and is checked moreover by the common consent of the majority, with its master of the ceremonies or policeman. But no such official has ever existed with regard to the things of the spirit. People have indeed been taught, often with demonstrations by the Secular Arm, *what to think* on certain questions of metaphysics and mythology. But at no time of the world's history have they been taught *how* to think whatever they did think: *how* in the sense of with what degree of self-assertion and self-contradiction, of aggressiveness or equivocation. Indeed, the lack of discipline, of decorum, nay common decency, in mankind's carriage of their own thought, may be due in part to the theological habits in which, through tradition and through reaction, most thinkers have been brought up. There is a saying of M. Renan's, that the conception of such a thing as abstract truth was fostered, if not originated, by the doctrinal disputes of early Christianity. And this seems likely, if we mean that theology encouraged the metaphysical habit of considering truth as a kind of entity which a man

could or not possess and reverence, and the respectful possession of which sacramental entity sent a man to heaven, instead of to prison and to hell. We are so accustomed to this attitude as not to perceive the grotesqueness of an individual pretending, or believing himself, to be not a human being who has learned and unlearned and is busy thinking out some question, but an oracle-mouth, connected telephonically with the Everlasting Mysteries, and out of which only Truth can be muttered or bellowed : the stoled and mitred *We* of the Church, surviving dowdily as the *We* of the Daily Press. Be this as it may, the theological habit of taking for granted, like the legendary Master of Balliol, *that what I don't know isn't knowledge* has to answer for such immodesty and violence in the realms of thought (usually described as *serene*) as would have otherwise been impossible from individuals who, when not acting as mouthpieces of eternal verity, were perfectly decent, modest and rational. Religious training also, with its constant commentary on the prognostications and anathemas of a school of particularly enigmatical and vituperative Hebrew dervishes, has accidentally accustomed us to endure and even to assume the prophetic attitude ; since, when one comes to think of it, the possession of exceptional psychological acumen, of generous purpose and of splendid expression, is not naturally and necessarily allied with the intellectual bad manners and uproariousness indulged in with impunity by Carlyle and Ruskin, Tolstoi and Nietzsche. While, on the other hand, theological disputations, those wonderful jousts of syllogisms with which Abélard or St. Bernard seem to have starred it through all the

capitals of Christendom, have left behind a tendency towards using argument not as a tool for sorting facts, but rather as a weapon for cleaving the skull of an adversary ; thus grafting some of the prize-fighter's brutality on to the more delicate and amiable acrobatic tricks of thought handed down by the sophists of antiquity.

### III

And here I see an opportunity of doing what, after all, I ought to do, namely, say a word or two about my own book and its title and sub-title. For this volume appears to be, more than anything else, an unintended exposure of such intellectual disorder as we have just been discussing. Unintended ; since these essays are in the most literal sense *marginalia*, mere puttings into shape of the notes taken, often with a pencil on the poor defaced books themselves, in the course of my readings ; and the title, "Gospels of Anarchy," has been extended from the initial essay to the whole volume because the connecting thread throughout it all appears to be my effort to extract some kind of order from the anarchy of the authors under consideration. In every case, even that of the novelists, my marginal notes reveal the need of saving that part of my teachers' teachings which I could subscribe to from the mass of illogical or exaggerated notions in which it is embedded. The professed anarchists under examination, Stirner, Ibsen, Whitman, Brewster, and Barrès, nay (I am sorry to have to tell him so !) Bernard Shaw, are by no means more subversive, in their most intentional sub-



versiveness, than the other apostles who did not dream of preaching or practising intellectual anarchy. On the contrary, one might almost say that the disorder, the passionate unruliness, the blind following of individual impulse, the derision of what other men have thought, the setting at defiance of the modes according to which all mankind has learned to think, the intellectual anarchy, in short, is greatest among upholders of old religious dogmas or ethics, and the framers of carefully thought-out systems. For let me explain once more what I mean by *intellectual anarchy*. It does not imply revolt from the creed in which a man has been brought up : Ruskin, for a good half of his life, was intellectually lawless precisely because he tried to explain æsthetic and moral phenomena by the theological notions of the past : it is disorderly to connect the political fall of Venice with Palladian architecture, and the inferiority of the later Scaliger tombs with the vices of despots. It is disorderly, when a man has emerged as far as Ruskin in his later and socialistic writings, still to continue thinking in terms of Original Sin. Even at the time of "Fors," Ruskin was haunted by the notion of a devil, however metaphorical, lurking in our paths, of Evil, with a capital E, poisoning the well-heads of all the holiest things. Ruskin ceased to believe in Christian dogma ; but he retained the theological habit of contempt and condemnation which, with its artificial raising of the judge over the judged, brings with it so much moral perversion and cruelty, so much intellectual crookedness and refusal to see. And these things also are disorder in the spiritual realm ; disorder none the less

real because it is the disorder inherited from an over-conservative Past, as distinguished from the disorder threatened (like that of professed anarchists) by an impatient Future.

Similarly it is disorder in the kingdom of the spirit when one of the noblest and most lucid of thinkers, the incomparable Nietzsche, allows himself, and is allowed by his disciples, to display in his years of saneness the terrible taint of approaching insanity. It is disorder equally when a man capable of being a physician of the soul's diseases like Nordau, permits himself, and is permitted, to diagnose a whole century's worth of art and literature as the production of various kinds of mania. Disorder that one of the most unflinching discoverers of social untruth, Tolstoi, condemns not one century's art, but nearly all the art of all the ages, because it does not point the moral like "Uncle Tom's Cabin." And—if I may re-state my perhaps audacious opinion—when an illustrious psychologist like William James preaches the *Will to believe*, there is not merely disorder postulated in the dislocated universe, but disorder actually present in the little world of writers and of readers. I have emphasised, in my previous sentence, the words "allowed" and "permitted." For part of our habitual intellectual anarchy consists in the fact that instead of mitigating and checking the extravagances to which solitary irresponsibility may lead a thinker, disciples and adversaries must really be charged with the worst of them. For disciples do not become disciples at all unless you furnish them with something wherewith to startle the neighbourhood and annoy their elders; they insist on

your knowing your own mind to the extent of leaving no mind worth knowing; and they thus arrest the natural process by which a thinker drops some of his own mistakes and picks up some of the truths of his rivals: like nothing so much in their action as those parasites whose presence in the body determines ossification of the tissues, premature senility, and a tendency to paralysis or to mania. Should this seem the sour-grapes of a writer chiefly notable for never having had a disciple, let the reader rummage in his memory for any case of a wise man being brought to book by a modest "Aren't you exaggerating, O Master?"—No: the chorus of disciples is always ready with its "Assuredly, O Socrates——"

The adversaries, on the other hand, misunderstanding and misrepresenting, merely exasperate the Sage or Prophet into caricaturing his own ideas in order to oppose theirs. Nor are the criticising adversaries the worst: your original thinker is usually exasperated into absurdity by the fact of criticising some one else, indeed, of recognising the existence of any tendency or views contrary to his own, even if they have been there for centuries, or rather particularly if such is the case. Thus, the fact that Christ's preachings of mansuetude had had a considerable audience, was, from the practical standpoint, an indication that there is something to be said for Christian virtues and even a place for them in the economy of the reasonable and self-respecting soul. But to Nietzsche (who in such things was not more of a maniac than many other great thinkers) this popularity of Christian ethics was a clear proof that they were unsuitable to the Super-Man; and so, quick, hand me

the hammer of Zarathustra to smash them all in smithereens !

Of course, it must be said that the Founder of Christianity had in his time laid about him pretty freely against Pharisees and Scribes ; and had exacted rather much from the rich young man who was willing to sell part of his estate ; in fact so much that the young man seems to have decided to sell none at all. And, in those sacred steps of moral exaggeration, Tolstoi has surely made up for Nietzsche's Egoism by condemning smoking and bicycling and scented soap as incompatible with love of one's neighbour. . . . Thus, taken as a class, moralists and religious teachers of all times have asked too much to obtain anything save dead-letter and reaction ; apostolic and Franciscan and Puritan Christianity on the one hand, and all the various Stoical and Rousseau-ish Reason and Nature Worships, on the other, showing us the bankruptcy of all such high-flown unpracticality. While as to the various doctrines erecting the Ego as the centre of all things and inculcating, like that of M. Barres in his pre-Nationalist days, the cultivation of the *Moi*, their only recommendation is that they should have ended off in the delightful comedies of Mr. Bernard Shaw.

There remain to be considered those philosophers who, leaving morals alone, have undertaken to furnish mankind with the necessary amount of abstract Truth, and to train it to clear and honest thought. This object has been sought chiefly by building symmetrical systems on the sites previously occupied by their rivals' gazebos, or out of the discarded materials of some crumbled edifice of belief ; so that any durable

result has usually been accidental, or at least incidental. A very remarkable book I have lately been reading, the "English Rationalism in the Nineteenth Century" of my old friend Mr. A. W. Benn, has left me with an overpowering impression that the most useful work of modern philosophy (a work, as the Education Bill shows, very far from completed!) has been the slow and arduous casting away of a portion of the Philosophy of Antiquity and the Middle Ages under the name of Established Religion, together with some picturesque remnants, accidentally mixed up with it, of even more venerable, indeed pre-historic, rites and regulations concerning sacrifices, fetishes and totems. Moreover, this indispensable piece of work, besides being merely negative and destructive, has been carried on mainly in that same unintentional, automatic manner in which the other steps of human progress have been secured: metaphysicians and divines having attacked one another from sheer self-assertion, self-interest and pugnacity, and a certain amount of error having luckily been torn down and trampled in these blind and undisciplined scuffles. But neither religion nor philosophy are really to thank for this incidental good result; and neither has shown any compunction for other incidental results of a less profitable kind, of which loss of time and littering the human mind with refuse are among the least.

I am aware that all the various exaggerations and errors compensate and neutralise one another in due course. But it seems an unwise arrangement that wisdom and virtue, of all things, should employ half of their day in clearing away the follies of previous

wisdom and virtue, and the other half in devising new follies of their own. In my marginal notes on Tolstoi I have adverted to the successive idol-makings and idol-burnings of which the history of thought chiefly consists. And in those on Nordau's "Degeneracy" I have tried to show how alternations of being persecuted and persecuting explain the lapses and ravings of great men, without our needing to *classify genius with epilepsy* or to fall foul of the obscure ancestors of illustrious persons. And the dominant note of this volume of essays is the dreary sense that initiation into the wisdom of the sages and prophets should consist mainly in wading through the rubbish in which that wisdom lies overwhelmed; and in carrying, by a wearying effort, one's willingness to learn and to respect through that pandemonium of self-assertion and anathema.

And this is what I was thinking of when I began by saying that abstract thought and ideal emotions, while imagining themselves too good for practical application, have in reality not been honest, and disciplined and responsible and unselfish enough for use.

#### IV

I can imagine a crass and worldly person remarking that where it is a question of daily bread, or of material convenience, progress, though slow (and Mr. Wells has told us how slow!), is not carried on exclusively upon these lines. And that the prevalence of such disorderly habits in certain departments of human activity

proves that those departments, to wit, philosophy, ethics and every kind of religion, are quite separate from the real life of mankind and have interest only for the persons who cultivate them in so eccentric and fruitless a fashion. M. Renan's paternal criticism on the symbolist poets might be applied, alas, to the philosophers and moralists of whom he is himself the most sceptically amiable: "Ce sont des enfants qui s'amuseut." Sages and prophets and saints, whether masters or disciples, would thus seem to have been venting their surplus energy according to Mr. Herbert Spencer's formula of the *Play Instinct*; and practical persons are aware that the play instinct leads, when to no worse, to sand castles, soap bubbles and mud pies. This is the tacit opinion of the immense majority of human beings; indeed, this judgment is so automatic and organic that it might startle most people to hear it put into words, and only a philosopher and moralist can waste breath in putting it! But looking facts in the face, this unspoken judgment of mankind is probably fairly correct. Philosophic speculation as distinguished from scientific, and ethical ideal as distinguished from superstitious regulations and practices, have, so far, had wonderfully little contact with the life of mankind; mankind has therefore not insisted on their being of a better quality; and not being of a better quality, &c., &c. 'Tis a vicious circle.

Here, being myself a philosopher and moralist, I can only, from the bottom of my heart, ejaculate "More's the pity!" It is a pity that mankind should live from hand to mouth without any veritable

thinking of thoughts or feeling of emotions save those connected with keeping itself tolerably alive and leaving behind a fresh supply of tolerably or intolerably living creatures. It is a dull state of things, and dullness turns easily to stimulants, which do more harm than good. Thinking large thoughts, feeling wide and unselfish emotions, is pleasant ; and it ought also to be useful. Mankind is none the better off in practical matters for its own selfishness and narrowness of mind. And (I do not think this can be a mere remnant of teleological superstition) if the play instinct of the race has expressed itself for æons in philosophy and religion, surely it must be that this play instinct (like that of kittens practising how to mouse, or little girls how to put dolls to bed) is the preparation for some useful employment. The time may come, who knows? when intellectual systems and ideal emotions be put to practical use ; and then mankind will see to their being, what they have not often been, really usable.

## V

Now when the Kingdom of Heaven shall be coming on Earth (and for those who believe in it the Kingdom of Heaven is always coming within their lifetime or their children's!) one of the most unmistakable signs will be the gradual cessation of all self-assertive ragings on the part of the Wise, and the gradual abatement of exaggerated claims and denunciations on the part of the Holy. Philosophers will begin



to think not in opposition but in co-operation, even as the Lion, we are told, will on a similar occasion lie down with the Lamb; and moralists will be full of understanding and respect towards human nature. Prophesying, in the fashion in which Carlyle and Ruskin, Tolstoi and Nietzsche, have carried on that calling, will cease; and most particularly prophesying against other prophets. Idols will no longer be publicly burnt by their former worshippers; and idols will be made only for strictly private devotion. Moral and intellectual health will be sufficient for each to choose how much he can accept of each set of views; intolerance, exaggeration and aggressiveness will no longer be needed to awaken torpid, or keep up vacillating, interest; the consciousness of being able to do but little will be an incentive to do the most; faith will move molehills because it no longer expects to move mountains; and the avowal of such a thing as a *will to believe* (in the sense of Professor William James) will be recognised as the sign of incapacity for any real belief at all.

If this is the change which Mr. Wells expects the twentieth century to inaugurate, why then deliberative planning-out of the Future, Constructive Socialism, and Voluntary Service (of a *Samurai* type) of Coming Generations, may presently begin to be realised. But the sign of the Coming of Utopia will be the purging and re-tempering of philosophical thought and ethical emotion in the furnace of responsibility.

Is this change really about to set in, even if it take almost a geological era to bring to maturity? I am unable to form an opinion; for I belong, alas,

to the generation of the Unreclaimed. But, for anything I can tell, it may be beginning already, with the appearance (if they have appeared!) of a small number of individuals belonging to the practical classes, like Mr. Wells's "skilled mechanic" and Mr. Shaw's immortal chauffeur 'Ennery, who will bring into abstract and ideal matters, into philosophy and ethics, some of the modesty of expectation and of the disciplined delicacy of handling without which they could not have perfected a bicycle and driven a motor-car.

Accustomed to do their best for the sake of the smallest advantage; accustomed to distrust equally themselves and their material, and to test skill by results; accustomed to work in concert with their mates and keep an eye on the improvements of their rivals; accustomed especially to the chances of success and failure, such people may bring into the things of the spirit a habit of fair play and self-criticism, of respect for achievement and contempt for perfunctoriness, a sense of responsibility born of dealing with things which have immediate and indisputable consequences, with simple and relentless facts which no definitions and no rhetoric can alter. It may be that this is the case. The integration of ideal thought and aspiration with practical life may be about to begin, may in fact be beginning; the anarchy of idea-less and impractical ideals may be drawing to a close. And the future at our hand, or at least within our sight, may show some application of that capacity for systematic thinking and impersonal emotion which has hitherto seemed little more than

a play instinct of the leisured portions of mankind. It may be. At any rate, Mr. Wells has a right to expect it; and we have a right to expect it when we consider Mr. Wells.

For in all his scientific books, but most of all in this latest one on America, Mr. Wells has given us something more valuable than even the most valuable ideas, and something more novel than the newest ones; and that is an example of what the attitude of the individual thinker might and (in my opinion) should be. The thing seems so simple and natural, now it is there, that it is almost unnecessary, and at any rate difficult, to describe it. Mr. Wells is not merely truthful in what he says—many people, including some impostors, have been that: he is truthful in his way of saying it. He does not dogmatise and he does not prophesy; he just thinks his own thoughts and asks us to listen to what he thinks. He does not imagine that he is come with a hammer to break idols and adversaries' skulls; nor pretend, to himself any more than to others, that he is come as the exponent of consecrated wisdom. He is neither the prophetic *I*, nor the sacerdotal *We*. He is just himself, believing in his own thoughts because they are his own, and ready to allow other folk to believe in theirs for the same simple reason. He knows that he is not the Mind of the Universe nor the Conscience of the Centuries, but an individual, like and unlike other individuals, liable to error, but all the more determined to be as little mistaken as may be; unable to attain certainty for himself, but all the more unable to accept it from any one else.

In fact he is, in his manner of feeling himself and of presenting himself to others, absolutely true to the reality of the case. Hence he is modest and self-reliant. And above all, knowing that he cannot give as much as is needed, he is generous in giving all he has. It never enters his head to ask anyone to be his follower; he seems never to have heard of those sublime sibylline manners with which prophets threaten to tell you nothing if you are not willing to accept all. What he says is said because it interests himself, and in the wish that it may also interest you; but he recognises that he himself is the person most interested. Similarly, he is no more proud than he is ashamed, of being an individual: he recognises it as the common lot and the *sine qua non* of activity, though the origin of some drawbacks. He does his best because it is all he can do.

It may be that such is a common attitude among scientific workers; I am too ignorant of their ways to tell. What I do know is that it is not the attitude of philosophers and of moralists, of sages and prophets and priests. What it is, undoubtedly, is human or humane, in the sense of being rational and well-bred; giving much, taking much, and not claiming more than one's own standing-room; moreover, that it answers to the reality of things. Hence it is an attitude which will work in with reality's action. What is more, I feel convinced that this is the attitude of the Future; the one which the Future will require, without any doubt; the one which the future will furnish, I most ardently hope. And in this hope of

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the gradual coming of intellectual self-restraint and goodwill, I am happy to take leave of the prophets and gospels of the anarchical past and anarchical present.

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